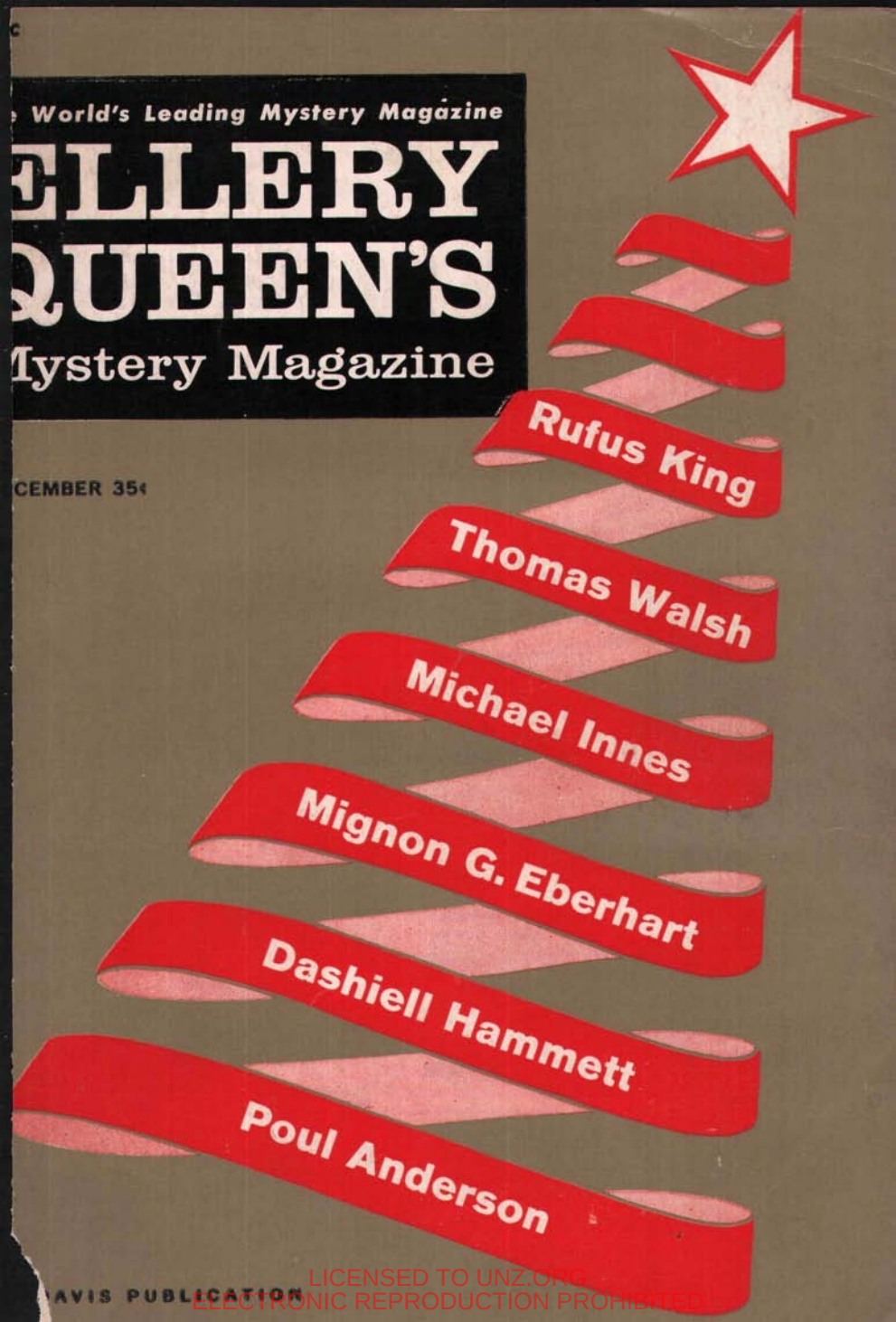

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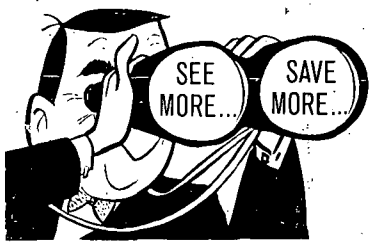

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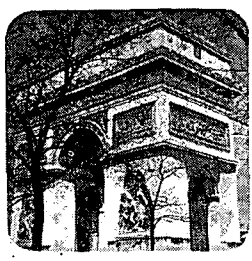

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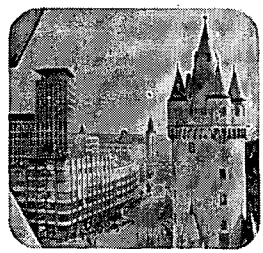

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PUBLISHER: *B. G. Davis* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 34, No. 6, Whole No. 193, DEC., 1959. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc. at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions and Canada; $5.00 in the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication Office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to 527 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Second-class mail privileges authorized at Concord, N. H. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879. *© 1959 by Davis Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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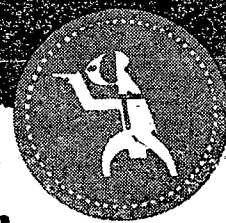

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THOMAS WALSH**

TITLE: ***Lady Cop***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Hanrahan

LOCALE: New York City and environs

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Well, well—a lady cop! Meet Policewoman Hanrahan—and there's fire in her beautiful blue eyes, especially when her fiancé gets into hot water. Yes, sir—a petticoat private eye! (But oh for the life of a lady cop!)*

IT WAS THE RING, ALL RIGHT. It almost had to be, by the dogged and recklessly extravagant way in which John Patrick McHale arranged the whole evening for her—dinner first at a really fabulous French restaurant on the East Side, then orchestra seats at the latest hit musical, then dancing afterward, and then the floor show at one of the elegant and most expensive night spots.

So they got out of his boss' car—the brand-new, oyster-white convertible of foreign make that John Patrick was taking care of over the weekend—in front of Policewoman Hanrahan's apartment house around twenty minutes of three Sunday morning; and in the vestibule, when John Patrick removed a small jeweler's box from his vest pocket with the most solemn care and deliberation, it was obviously the moment which—and for most of her adult life, practically—Policewoman Hanrahan had dreaded one instant and then feverishly desired at another.

She rang hurriedly for the elevator, braced herself, and remembered her manners.

"A present?" Policewoman Hanrahan cried, attempting to sound

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astonished and indeed delighted with the jeweler's box—but aware, of course, that the diamond, if it was a diamond, wouldn't be much bigger than a speck of dust on John Patrick McHale's salary.

"Why, John Patrick! What have you got there? Let's see, can't you? What *is* it?"

But he was a very big and very deliberate young man, never to be pushed by anyone. Now he fixed her with that dark, under-the-brows look of his, the one always promising so much to Policewoman Hanrahan, and delivering so little; cleared his throat; and announced grimly that he knew how she felt about him. Well, that was all right, John Patrick said. He expected no miracles But if . . .

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Policewoman Hanrahan exclaimed, something snapping in her so suddenly and sharply that she folded her arms, cast her eyes up at the ceiling, and tapped one foot. "So that's it. You know how *I* feel about *you!* Well, I wish I knew. I wish—oh, give me the box, can't you? What is it? The engagement ring?"

And she reached out. Then her breath caught, her mouth dropped open, and she looked incredulously from the jeweler's box to John Patrick.

"Oh, no!" Policewoman Hanrahan whispered at him—a tall, slim girl, beautifully and rather scornfully poised on all normal occasions, with a graceful and independent swing to her shoulders, delicate neat features, very ladylike, and the finest and most expressive of blue eyes. "Now look here a minute. Just . . . How in the world could you afford anything like *this?* How much did you pay for it? Why, John Patrick McHale!"

He was still watching her fixedly; but of course, even at this moment, nothing developed from it—not with John Patrick. Now she must understand that he'd be quite willing to wait, he told her; he wasn't trying to rush her into anything. But he had just thought it was about time they came to some sort of understanding about themselves. And if she agreed on that—well, she knew how he felt about her, didn't she?

"Well, of course," Policewoman Hanrahan said, but in rather a miserable and forlorn manner. Always the romantic, she was telling herself; always hoping for the one memorable and beautiful moment, even with John Patrick; and always getting from him . . .

She reached out again and touched his hand gently, the old familiar and foolishly maternal tenderness coming over her.

"I don't know," she confessed unhappily. "So I wouldn't want to promise you anything, John Patrick. I'm just not *sure*. But I guess I could wear the ring, if you wanted me to. And if . . . You do want me to, don't you?"

"Whatever you think best," John

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Patrick announced solemnly, leaning forward now and kissing her in quite his usual manner, way up on top of her left ear somewhere "That's all I want, Kitty—and you know that. Whatever you say."

"Then all right," Policewoman Hanrahan said, winking hurriedly down at her third finger, left hand, and hoping with desperate intensity that she wasn't going to make a fool of herself in her own hallway. "We do want to be sensible about it, don't we? Let's think it over a bit—that's the best way. Well—" And she smiled up brightly, under better control now. "I did kiss you good night, didn't I?"

"That's right," John Patrick said. "Good night now; good night, Kitty."

Then the door closed and Policewoman Hanrahan floated miserably away from him. And that was the big moment for her, she told herself, her eyes closed and her throat hurting a little. That was the thing a girl was supposed to dream about, and wait for.

But what choice had anyone ever given Kathleen Marie Hanrahan in this matter? When she was small and at school John Patrick had always carried her books for her; their families lived in the same Yorkville street and were the best and warmest of good friends; and so, little by little, everyone had assumed—even John Patrick and Kathleen Marie—that everything was settled between them.

But was it? Policewoman Hanrahan wondered, her eyes misting pathetically. She did like him, of course. It was even possible that she could like him a lot. But a girl wanted at least some tenderness . . .

The elevator stopped. She walked out of it, wiping the corner of each eye rather emotionally, opened her purse and heard a tiny scuffle of —sound near the service stairway.

"Hey, Hanrahan!" a voice said—a coarse, masculine voice, oddly familiar. "Wait up a minute. He's gone, ain't he?"

She turned. Behind her, half in shadow and half out, she glimpsed the sharp, shrewd-looking small eyes, the cautious round face, and the upspringing red hair of Sergeant Murray Goldberg, an old friend and working colleague from one of the big and important headquarters details.

"Been following you around all night," Murray Goldberg complained, moving forward petulantly. "And in this weather. Then I snuck in the back way downstairs while you and McHale were out talking in—" He saw the ring blazing at him. His eyes widened. "Wow!" he said. "Hey! Give us a look, Hanrahan. Where did you get *that?*"

And he held out his hand to her. But Policewoman Hanrahan, not quite composed yet, retreated two steps, shook her head quickly, and took the instinctive feminine precaution of putting the ring behind her.

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"Now that's my business!" she declared breathlessly. "And not yours. But what are you talking about, Murray? What do you want up here?"

"Now that kind of depends," Murray Goldberg told her, still holding his hand out. "Because—well, just where and how did a kid like you happen to meet up with that jerk in the white convertible? Exactly how long has he been hanging around here, anyway? And what's between you?"

"Between us?" Policewoman Hanrahan repeated. She looked completely stunned. "Why, Murray! You sound as if—"

"Guess I do," Murray Goldberg grunted at her. "But that's all right; and Cornelius Corrigan will sound the same way tomorrow morning. Now come on, Hanrahan, quit stalling around. Gimme that ring!"

"So that's it. Well, I see, said the blind man, when he didn't see at all," Inspector Cornelius Corrigan grunted at her.

The time was 9:30 the next morning, the place his private office downtown, and the sole audience, both for him and for Policewoman Hanrahan, was a grim, attentive-looking and speaking-when-spoken-to Murray Goldberg.

"You've known this John Patrick McHale all your life, practically; you're even engaged to the man; and yet you have no idea how he could afford one of them fancy racing cars for himself and a big diamond engagement ring for you personally. You know they cost him money, of course—a lot of money. And still . . ."

He inched forward across the desk on one elbow, then pointed at her. "Now I'll give you the one chance, Hanrahan—and you mind it. How would you say that he could afford such things? Where's the money coming from?"

Policewoman Hanrahan glared back at him, set her teeth, and pressed her forehead distractedly.

"But I've told you!" she cried. "I've told you and told you—and you just won't listen. He's only minding that car for one of the executives down at the construction company he works for—a Mr. J. Norman Hildebrand. Tomorrow—or today, I mean—is Mrs. Hildebrand's birthday, and they're having a big party up in the country, and the car is a surprise for *her*. We're going to drive up in it and deliver it, and then join the party ourselves. We've been invited! Why don't you phone Mr. Hildebrand? Why don't you check what I'm telling you?"

"Oh, I'll check it," Cornelius Corrigan said curtly. "Don't worry about that, woman. But how about your three-thousand-dollar diamond ring? Do you mean to sit there and tell me right to my face that Mr. Hildebrand gave him the ring too?"

"Inspector." Policewoman Hanra-

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han pressed her forehead again. "I don't know who's crazy here—but *someone* is. That ring isn't worth $3000. It just couldn't be! Not on *his* salary."

"Then I suppose it dropped out of his fairy godfather's back pocket," Cornelius Corrigan said, smiling darkly at her. "Is that it? Now you just told me that you're engaged. When's the wedding?"

"Well, I don't know," Policewoman Hanrahan mumbled. "We didn't settle that part. You see—"

"And didn't you?" Cornelius Corrigan said, looking her up and down critically. "Why not? He loves you, doesn't he—and you love him? Then what's the delay, woman?"

"Well—" Policewoman Hanrahan swallowed with effort. "That's —that's a little hard to explain, Inspector. We've known each other a long time—all our lives, really; so we're sensible about it. We're not rushing anything. It's not as if—well, as if I was head over heels about him or he was head over heels about me. We're more like brother and sister, I guess—or, anyway, he acts that way. He just takes me for granted, I suppose."

"Now *that's* a fine start." Cornelius Corrigan laughed coarsely. "Brother and sister! And that satisfies you, Hanrahan? Why, you're a pretty little thing. You could get another fellow for yourself, and maybe a damn sight better one, just by crooking your finger. You know that, don't you?"

"Oh, maybe," Policewoman Hanrahan said, her throat hurting again. "But John Patrick and me—well, I just can't explain, Inspector. Sometimes I feel simply infuriated and fed up with him; and sometimes . . ." She honked forlornly into a lace handkerchief. "But why are you asking me all these things? Is John Patrick in trouble?"

Cornelius Corrigan peered sharply at her, then slapped the desk, slapped it again, and leaned forward.

"All right," Corrigan said. "Here it is—but in strict confidence, Hanrahan, so mind that now, and mind that you mind, too. You recall, I suppose, the payroll holdup at the place he works? Four months ago it was. There was a clerk knocked over the head and a guard shot. The payroll amounted to $53,000 in hard cash, and the way the thing was plotted and carried out, down to the second, made us decide right off the bat that it was an inside job by one of the company employees. After that, of course, we began to keep a quiet and careful check on the whole lot of them until—only yesterday, do you see?—we came up with your diamond ring and that fancy sports car. Now where did John Patrick McHale get hold of those things? How did he pay for them? Do you know, Hanrahan? Would you be able to give us even the least idea?"

But Policewoman Hanrahan only sat back dazedly.

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"An idea?" she said. "Well, no, I'm afraid not. So you think John Patrick's the man you want? You think—"

"I think he might be," Corrigan snapped at her. "Who's to say? Not that I'm forgetting a couple of other people down there whose names I could mention to you, but won't, Hanrahan—not at this time. However. Go up to that party tonight at the Hildebrands'. Keep your eyes and ears open. Cuddle and cajole this John Patrick McHale—and find out for us the true story about that racing car and that diamond ring. Now that's the sensible thing, isn't it? If he's innocent you'll help to acquit the man; and if he isn't—well, you'll save everybody a lot of trouble by handling the matter neatly and quietly. We'd get him anyway in the long run—you know we would. So what do you say, woman? Can we trust you in this?"

"Why, of course!" Policewoman Hanrahan said, her blue eyes flashing. "Naturally! I might be engaged to him—but what does that matter? I can still spy and snoop on the man—even betray him. He'd just never suspect *me* of that—so it's perfect, isn't it?"

She jumped up and pointed at Cornelius Corrigan, her voice soaring. "Well, let me tell you something right *now!* This marks a new low, even for you, Inspector! What kind of woman do you think I am, anyway? What kind of heart do I have in me?"

"Now, now," Cornelius Corrigan said, presenting both hands to her calmly and quietly, palms outward. "No commotion, please—and no Broadway play-acting. Yes or no, Hanrahan? That's all. Just the admission."

"Just the admission!" Policewoman Hanrahan said, her whole face blazing. "Why—why, you must be crazy, the two of you. You've never met John Patrick; you've never talked to him; and yet you sit here and act as if—No, and thank you very much, Inspector. *Never!* Where are my gloves?"

She snatched them up and behind her Murray Goldberg made a covert but significant gesture to Cornelius Corrigan, as if he had expected this reaction from her all along and had even warned about it. Cornelius Corrigan glared at him, opened his mouth, closed it, and pointed at Policewoman Hanrahan. Murray Goldberg nodded, a bit smugly, and moved forward.

"Then maybe we can use that other dame of his over on the West Side," Murray Goldberg said, as if thinking absently and out loud. "The one he bought that mink coat for, and half a dozen of them Frenchy nightgowns. What did you do with those bills, Inspector? They were right here on your desk, weren't they?"

And he began tumbling papers around. Policewoman Hanrahan, over at the hall door by now, opened it, hesitated an instant, then

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faced them with withering sarcasm.

"Oh, of course!" she said. Frenchy nightgowns—and John Patrick McHale! What a liar you are, Murray Goldberg! What a cunning, contemptible—"

But he had the papers then and she snatched them. Her eyes raced over the first one, and the second, and the third. She turned a dark, curious gray; her hands dropped; and her face seemed to ripple apart somehow, helplessly and pathetically, from dead center.

"Oh, no!" she whispered. "He couldn't have—not John Patrick! Why, he loves me, Inspector. He—" She turned blindly, dropping the bills, walked head-on into Cornelius Corrigan, and clutched at him. "No!" she wailed. "No! Inspector!"

"Ah, you poor child," Corrigan soothed, heaving a doleful and protracted sigh at the same instant. "You poor deluded little creature, you. Hush, now. Shhh, Hanrahan."

And he began patting her with just the right effect of clumsy masculine compassion. Over her, however, and while still patting, he winked slyly and triumphantly at Murray Goldberg; and Murray Goldberg, with Policewoman Hanrahan at last cornered and treed by the two of them, though she was not aware of the fact, preened himself, smirked, and winked slyly and triumphantly at his superior.

But what followed, naturally enough, was a long, bitter afternoon for her back in the apartment living room, with the shades drawn, a cold towel over her brow, and a bottle of headache tablets on one of the end tables. Now, she told herself, now she could understand why Mr. John Patrick McHale hadn't even bothered to take her in his arms last night and kiss her and murmur tender and loving endearments.

He had offered her the ring, of course; he had been forced to after all their years of knowing each other; but he had been glum and stand-offish, not because it was his nature, as she had so foolishly supposed, but because he had hoped in his heart that she was going to refuse him once and for all.

There was the mink coat over on the West Side, and the French nightgowns; and in John Patrick himself there had been a duplicity and double-dealing so monstrous . . .

She hiccupped softly and reached out through hot, scalding tears for another headache tablet. But it didn't help very much. Nothing could, obviously.

And even at five o'clock, when John Patrick McHale showed up right on schedule, she was still, despite all available feminine prettifications, drawn-looking, a bit hollow-eyed, and far from her best. Even John Patrick commented boomingly on that fact. What was the matter with her?

"The matter?" Policewoman Hanrahan repeated blurrily. "Why,

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nothing. Nothing at all, John Patrick McHale. What could be?"

However, there was one rather curious thing. All the way up to the Hildebrands' summer place north of Katonah she kept watching John Patrick with a helplessly fascinated attention. Here was the man who wouldn't say boo to a goose—not while Policewoman Hanrahan was around, in any event; and yet, over on the West Side, as proved and attested by the charge account slips made out to a Pearletta Something-or-other, he lived another and far richer life. Oh, the rotten skunk! The low, sneaking . . .

"But I'm *not* staring at you!" Policewoman Hanrahan flared out at him near Hawthorne Circle. "You must be dreaming things. Now you just let me alone, John Patrick McHale. Stop bullying me!"

She felt so exactly like that, so beaten down, so mocked and derided by him, that she averted her face and whimpered a little. Later on, at the Hildebrands', she accepted a rather powerful dry Martini from Mr. Hildebrand himself and chatted with him while John Patrick was getting some charcoal out of the garage. She asked certain questions —the Cornelius Corrigan questions —and got certain answers. Then, wearing a tight, rather venomous smile, she recklessly drank two more Martini cocktails, wandered into the Hildebrand kitchen for some needed privacy, and added everything up rapidly.

No one disturbed her there. The other guests, Mr. Hildebrand had told her, would be coming over in an hour with Mrs. Hildebrand from the country club. So she was alone in the kitchen, and she strode around in it taking deeper and deeper breaths, and once she kicked a trash basket for no discernible reason whatever.

But the nerve of that John Patrick McHale! she was now telling herself furiously. He had pretended solemn and undying devotion to her, high respect, manly solicitude. And all the time, with a cheap little showgirl named Pearletta—

The terrace door opened.

"Kitty?" John Patrick called in to her. "Oh, there you are. I was worried about you. Are you feeling all right?"

"Fine, just fine!" Policewoman Hanrahan told him, but through set teeth. "Just wonderful! Only I thought Mr. Hildebrand loaned you the racing car, and got you the engagement ring too—through some relative of his in the jewelry business. I thought—or isn't that the story you had for me on the way over here?"

"Well, he did," John Patrick said. He looked manfully puzzled. "He got the ring at cost, Kitty—a hundred and fifty dollars. You still like it, don't you?"

"A hundred and fifty dollars!" Policewoman Hanrahan repeated, lashing out savagely then and there, Cornelius Corrigan or no Cornelius

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Corrigan. "Or maybe a hundred and fifty cents, even. Then why would he lie about it? And I just asked him. He did't get you that ring and that car, John Patrick McHale—and you know it! But you think you're so smart, don't you? Well, maybe you are and maybe you aren't. But wait and see, that's all—just wait and see!"

"What?" John Patrick blinked slowly, looking out at the terrace behind them. "Keep it down," he said. "Mr. Hildebrand might hear you. What are you so mad about?"

"Then I just hope he does!" Policewoman Hanrahan declared vehemently, everything now coming to a smashing and uncontrollable climax in her by way of those second and third Martinis. "I imagine the ring was supposed to make a fool out of somebody. Is that it? Well, let me tell you something right now, John Patrick McHale—" and her voice wobbled desperately. "I just felt *sorry* for you. That's why I took it. Why, you're nothing to me—even less than nothing. And there! How does the truth sound to you now, you despicable liar, you?"

John Patrick smiled thickly. He had black hair, broad shoulders, and a pug face; he rarely showed anything; but when he did, as Policewoman Hanrahan had discovered once or twice in years past, the storm signals were up and flying and he spoke in a serene, dreamy voice. He spoke like that now, moistening his lips carefully first.

"Well, I don't know," John Patrick said. "But I've liked it ever since we were kids, haven't I? I ought to, Kitty—because this is the treatment I got from you year after year. Even last night, if you want to know, when I gave you the ring. You just stood there. You just treated me like—why, I never even kissed you—not the way I wanted to, anyway. You acted as if—"

His voice rose somewhat, which was altogether extraordinary in John Patrick.

"I *acted?*" Policewoman Hanrahan burst out, so astounded and enraged by this accusation that she could barely get her words into coherent order. "Why, you must be out of your mind. You don't have to pretend any more, John Patrick McHale, because nobody wants you to. You were the great innocent, weren't you? Why, you didn't even know how to hold a girl or put your arms around her—didn't know what to say, even. Well, you didn't with *me,* mister—and never forget that. Don't fool yourself. I suppose when you kissed the tip of my ear last night you thought you were so wonderful that I'd pass right out—" and she laughed shrilly. "Of course. That was the idea, I suppose. Why, you had me tingling all over, John Patrick McHale. Honestly! Right down to my shoetops."

He wasn't slow and deliberate after that outburst. He bellowed something. Then, without uttering

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a word, he got hold of Policewoman Hanrahan by her two wrists and swung her around into the refrigerator door so suddenly and so hard that the back of her head bounced. He forced her head up and back after butting her under the chin like a fighting bull, and then he began to kiss her—kiss her all over, and not the way he had kissed her last night.

There was a wild, perhaps desperate, hunger and sweetness in it now, and several other things—all badly confused, somehow—that Policewoman Hanrahan had wanted often and often, and never found in him. He kissed her on the throat under the ears and then frenziedly on the cheeks and then on the mouth. It was inconceivable for a second or two—and then simply insane. Her arms were still pinioned back. Her lips felt crushed under his. Her ears rang.

"All right! Why don't you boss somebody around now?" John Patrick gritted at her. "Go ahead—say John Patrick this and John Patrick that! The way your old lady does and your old man! Sure, they liked me. They trusted me! They always knew you were all right if you were out with John Patrick, didn't they? And so did you! Why, the whole family of you had me afraid to open my mouth, even, or to touch you. You weren't my girl. I had to treat you like my own sister, and your old man told me so. Well, maybe I didn't want to treat you like that. Maybe what I really felt, Kathleen Marie Hanrahan . . ." And he kissed her again, long, hard, achingly. "There!" he said. "Got enough, have you? See what I'm driving at?"

"Yes," Policewoman Hanrahan whispered, turning away from him now and covering her face shamedly with both hands. "Yes. Oh, John Patrick. Please!"

"Sure," he said, and flung her aside breathlessly. "Oh, John Patrick! Good old John Patrick—the friend of the whole family! Well, you better grow up, Kitty Hanrahan—you better find out the score. I kissed you just now because I wanted to show you a little of what it's like when it means anything at all to two normal people. What it means to you, though—well, I don't know and I don't think I care any more. I only kissed the tip of your ear last night—and it was still the loveliest and most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. You know why? Because I had something to give you, that's why. And you wouldn't even look at me. You stood there. You acted as if—"

Mr. Hildebrand ran in. He looked funny and white, all excited, if Policewoman Hanrahan could believe her own sense impressions. She wasn't sure, exactly. Her ears were still ringing.

"Who's that in the driveway?" Mr. Hildebrand demanded thickly. "Who is it?"

She closed her eyes, not knowing

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and not caring; but now slow, bitter tears began showing themselves.

"And get away from that door!" Mr. Hildebrand said—or squealed, actually. "McHale! Stay where you are!"

Then Policewoman Hanrahan opened her eyes and saw the gun Mr. Hildebrand was pointing at John Patrick—and saw on the terrace behind them Murray Goldberg trotting cautiously around from the garage with a big man in a state trooper's uniform.

"Murray!" she cried out, her professional instinct taking over. "Look out. Don't come in here. He's got a gun!"

Then Mr. Hildebrand swung around to her, fired wildly, and John Patrick moved. He reached out with those big hands of his and turned Mr. Hildebrand around, then hit him and hit him again. So it was all over in just half a minute or so. Murray Goldberg ran in, with the state trooper on his heels. It was just about five minutes past six Sunday evening.

Two hours later there was a last wrapup in Cornelius Corrigan's office.

"Now I see it," Policewoman Hanrahan declaimed tragically after the last thread had been unraveled. "You both insisted to me that John Patrick was the thief you wanted—when all the time you must have had at least some suspicions about that boss of his. And still you let me go and—oh, Inspector! Do you understand what you've *done* to me? *Do* you?"

"Eh?" Cornelius Corrigan inquired, peering irritably at her, and without even the least outward sign of compunction. "Talk sense, can't you? Why, I suspected at least half a dozen people over there and wasn't sure of any of them until I found out only a couple of hours ago who it was that had set up the charge accounts for that showgirl, Pearletta Buckingham, or whatever she calls herself. Then—"

"Pearletta Buckingham?" Policewoman Hanrahan whispered. "You mean it *wasn't* John Patrick, then? You only *pretended* to me?"

"Let's just say that it seemed like a good idea," Corrigan grunted. "At the time, Hanrahan—and with her department-store bills fortunately available. I wanted you to keep an eye on this McHale, and you wouldn't, if you care to remember. However. Hildebrand intended to kill the two of you, of course, and bury you somewhere, then burn or destroy the car. That's why you were the first guests up there, Hanrahan—and the only ones.

"It was all a pretty foxy arrangement on Hildebrand's part. First, he ordered the foreign car by registered mail, paying in cash; then he got Johnny McHale to pick it up for him and drive it around last night under cover of that cock-and-bull story about his wife's birthday. Then he got him the ring—and

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of course McHale couldn't have told anyone whether the diamond in it was worth $3000 or $300. How many people can, actually? So he took it on faith. But later, when Hildebrand would tell us he hadn't asked McHale to take charge of the car for him or ordered the ring either, we were supposed to think that the two of you had lit out for parts unknown with the car, the diamond ring, and the rest of that $53,000.

"Hildebrand had a girl friend, a wife, and a family—and a fortune he didn't dare spend unless and until we stopped watching him. So he set up a patsy, investing in the car and the ring. And it wasn't a bad idea, either. Suppose he had sunk the two of you up there—dumped you into the lake along with the car, probably? Who'd know about it? Who'd ever suspect him? But of course, when the Buckingham woman broke down, we had our man and I sent Goldberg up for him—and just in time, too. Now everyone's happy and contented . . . Aren't you?"

"Oh, sure," Policewoman Hanrahan told him, looking miserable. "All I did was to call John Patrick McHale a despicable liar, Inspector. And all he did was to call me things that . . . Well, I'll never forgive him for *them*. Never, Inspector. I just *couldn't!*"

"Fancy that now," Corrigan drawled, with an air of world weary and extremely aggravating omniscience "Never. Oh, dear!" He got up, reached for his cigar, and went out to the corridor. "Send in McHale," he ordered one of the uniformed men. "My office. Tell him to wait there till I get back from the file room."

And he marched off.

So now he'd leave her alone with John Patrick McHale for a few minutes, Policewoman Hanrahan told herself, and very emotionally; and that was supposed to . . .

Her throat tightened. But it wasn't true, what John Patrick had accused her of—that she acted with him in the same cool, unemotional, and altogether detached way that she had always felt he acted with her. It couldn't be true; and if it was—say, just a little—then they both wanted something so much, so deeply, that it had to be offered to them. It couldn't be taken or struggled for. It had to be something free, beautiful, shining . . .

She wiped the corners of her eyes. She hadn't quite finished when John Patrick McHale walked in. They looked at each other. Then his glance wavered in a sullen and hangdog fashion.

"Well, I wouldn't know where to turn, either," Policewoman Hanrahan whispered. "The things you said to me, John Patrick McHale, and the *way* you—are you ashamed of yourself, or aren't you? Are you asking my pardon?"

He mumbled something.

"What?" Policewoman Hanra-

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han said. "I didn't hear you."

"Then hear this!" John Patrick said—and they must have heard it all the way down in the file room. "All I ever wanted from you was a little tenderness and affection. And you know it!"

"Oh, of course," Policewoman Hanrahan said. "Tenderness and affection, you say! Well, I could show you tenderness, all right, if I wanted to. I could—"

Then John Patrick gave in. The bulldog expression softened.

"Then want to," John Patrick said, very low. "This once, Kitty! Why can't you?"

And why couldn't she? Policewoman Hanrahan began asking herself, slowly and confusedly. Because she was waiting for John Patrick?—while John Patrick was waiting for her? But that was the immovable force and the irresistible object. That was . . .

She got up slowly, the whole top of her scalp tingling. But why? Surely not because . . .

"You think I'm afraid?" Policewoman Hanrahan managed to get out. "Well, I'll show *you,* John Patrick McHale. I'll—are you sure that door's closed?"

It seemed to be, and so Policewoman Hanrahan was able to show him finally, and not way up on top of the ear, either. It was wonderful. It was so wonderful that all ladylike pride and reserve gave up the ghost, helplessly and forever, in Kathleen Marie.

"Oh, Kitty!" John Patrick whispered, as though confounded by what had just happened to him.

"So all right," Policewoman Hanrahan whispered back, her heart just whacking away now and her face shining up at him with sweet anguish. "Don't stand there *dreaming* about it. *Do* something! Come on; come on, John Patrick McHale. Now you show me!"

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WHEN LUCK'S RUNNING GOOD

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

A SHRIEK, UNMISTAKENLY FEMInine, and throbbing with terror, pierced the fog. Phil Truax, hurrying up Washington Street, halted in the middle of a stride and became as motionless as the stone apartment buildings that flanked the street.

The shriek swelled, with something violin-like in it, and ended with a rising inflection. Half a block away the headlights of two automobiles, stationary and oddly huddled together, glowed in the mist. Silence, a guttural grunt, and the shriek again . . . but now it held more anger than fear, and broke off suddenly.

Phil remained motionless. Whatever was happening ahead was none of his business, and he was a meddler in other people's affairs only when assured of profit therefrom. And, too, he was not armed. Then he thought of the $400 in his pocket: his winnings in the poker game he had just left. He had been lucky thus far tonight: mightn't his luck carry him a little further if he gave it the opportunity? He pulled his hat down firmly on his head and ran towards the lights.

The fog aided the headlights in concealing from him whatever was happening in the machines as he approached them, but he noticed that the engine of at least one was running. Then he skirted one of them, a roadster, checking his momentum by catching hold of a mudguard. For a fraction of a second he hung there, while dark eyes burned into his from a white face half hidden under a brawny hand.

Phil hurled himself on the back of the man to whom the hand belonged; his fingers closed around a sinewy throat. A white flame seared his eyeballs; the ground went soft and billowy under his feet, as if it

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were part of the fog. Everything—the burning eyes, the brawny hand, the curtains of the automobile—rushed toward him . . .

Phil sat up on the wet paving and felt his head. His fingers found a sore, swelling area running from above the left ear nearly to the crown. Both automobiles were gone. No pedestrians were in sight. Lights were shining through a few windows; forms were at many windows; and curious voices were calling questions into the fog.

Mastering his nausea, he got unsteadily to his feet, though his desire was to lie down again on the cool, damp street. Hunting for his hat, he found a small handbag and thrust it into his pocket. He recovered his hat from the gutter, tilted it to spare the bruise, and set out for home, ignoring the queries of the pajamaed spectators.

Dressed for bed, and satisfied that the injury to his head was superficial, Phil turned his attention to the souvenir of his adventure. It was a small bag of black silk, trimmed with silver beads, and still damp from its contact with the street.

He dumped the contents on the bed, and a bundle of paper money caught his eye. He counted the bills and found they totaled $355. Pushing the bills into the pocket of his bathrobe, he grinned. "Four hundred I win and three hundred and fifty I get for a tap on the head—a pretty good night!"

He picked up the other articles, looked at them, and returned them to the bag. A gold pencil, a gold ring with an opal set in it, a woman's handkerchief with a gray border and an unrecognizable design in one corner, a powder-box, a small mirror, a lipstick, some hairpins, and a rumpled sheet of note-paper covered with strange, exotic characters.

He smoothed out the paper and examined it closely, but could make nothing out of it. Some Asiatic language, perhaps. He took the ring from the bag again and tried to estimate its value. His knowledge of gems was small, but he decided that the ring could not be worth much—not more than $50 at the most. Still, $50 is $50. He put the ring with the money, lit a cigarette, and went to bed.

Phil awoke at noon. His head was still tender to the touch, but the swelling had gone. He walked downtown, bought early editions of the afternoon papers, and read them while he ate breakfast. He found no mention of the struggle on Washington Street, and the "Lost and Found" columns held nothing pertaining to the bag. That night he played poker until daylight and won $240. In an all-night lunchroom he read the morning papers. Still nothing of the struggle, but in the classified section of the *Chronicle:*

LOST—Early Tuesday morning, Lady's black silk bag

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trimmed with silver, containing money, ring, gold pencil, letter, etc. Finder may keep money if other articles are returned to CHRONICLE OFFICE.

He grinned, then frowned, and stared speculatively at the advertisement. The ring couldn't be worth three hundred dollars. He took it from his pocket, shielding it with a hand from the chance look of anyone in the lunchroom. No—$50 would be a big price. The pencil, powder-box, and lipstick case were of gold; but $150, say, would more than replace everything in the bag. The undecipherable letter remained—that must be the important item! A struggle between a woman and some men at four in the morning, nothing about it in the newspapers, a lost bag containing a paper covered with foreign characters, and then this generous offer—it might mean almost anything!

Of course, the wisest plan would be either to disregard the advertisement and keep what he had found, or to accept this offer and send everything but the money to the *Chronicle*. Either way would be playing it safe; but when a man's luck is running good he should crowd it to the limit.

Times come, as every gambler knows, when a man gets into a streak of luck, when everything he touches proves fruitful; and his play then is to push his luck to a fare-you-well—make a killing while the fickle goddess is smiling.

He thought of the men he had known who had paid for their timidity in the face of Chance's favor—men who had won dollars where they might have won thousands, men who were condemned to be pikers all their lives through lack of courage to force their luck when it ran strong, an inability to rise with their stars.

"And my luck's running good," he whispered to the ring in his hand. "A thousand smackers in two days, after the long dry spell I've been through."

He returned the ring to his pocket and reviewed the chain of incidents leading up to the advertisement. Two facts that had lurked in his subconsciousness came out to face him: the shrieking voice had been musical even in its terror, and the eyes that had burned into his had been very beautiful.

He made up his mind as he finished his coffee.

"I'll sit in this racket, whatever it is, for a little while, anyway; and see what I can get myself."

At ten o'clock that morning Phil telephoned the office of the *Chronicle*, told the girl to whom he talked that he had found the bag but would return it to no one but its owner, and went back to bed.

At two o'clock he got up and dressed. He returned the ring to the bag, with everything except the money, and went into the kitchen to prepare breakfast. He usually went

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out for his meals, but today he wanted to be sure that he would not miss whoever might telephone or call. He had scarcely finished his meal when the doorbell rang.

"Mr. Truax?"

Phil nodded and invited the caller in. The man who entered the flat was about forty years old, nearly as tall as Phil, and perhaps twenty-five pounds heavier. He was fastidiously groomed in clothes of a European cut, and a walking-stick was crooked over one arm.

He accepted a chair with a polite smile, and said, "I shall take but a moment of your time. It is about the bag that I have come. The newspaper informed me you had found it."

He betrayed his foreignness more by the precision of his enunciation than by any accent.

"It is your bag?" Phil asked with just a hint of a chuckle.

The caller's red lips parted, baring twin rows of even white teeth.

"It is my niece's, but I can describe it. A black silk bag of about this size"—indicating with his small, shapely hands—"trimmed with silver, and holding between three and four hundred dollars, a gold pencil, a ring—an opal ring—a letter written in Russian, and the powder and rouge accessories that one would expect to find in a young woman's bag. Perhaps a handkerchief with her initial in Russian on it. That is the one you found?"

"It might be, Mr. ——?"

"Pardon me, sir!" The visitor extended a card. "Kapaloff, Boris Kapaloff."

Phil took the card and pretended to scrutinize it while he marshalled his thoughts. He was far from certain that he cared to force himself into this man's affairs. The man's whole appearance—the broad forehead slanting down from the roots of the crisp black hair to bulge a little just above the brows; the narrow, widely spaced eyes of cold hazel; the aquiline nose with a pronounced flare to the nostrils; the firm, too-red lips; the hard line of chin and jaw—evidenced a nature both able and willing to hold its own in any field.

And while Phil considered himself second to no man in guile, he knew that his intrigues had heretofore been confined to the world of tinhorn gamblers, ward-heelers, and such small fry. Small schooling for a game with this man whose voice, appearance, and poise proclaimed a denizen of a greater, more subtle world. Of course, if some decided advantage could be gained at the very outset . . .

"Where was the bag lost?" Phil asked.

The Russian's poise remained undisturbed.

"That would be most difficult to say," he replied in his cultured, musical voice. "My niece had been to a dance, and she carried several friends to their homes before returning to hers. The bag may have dropped from the car anywhere along the way."

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A temptation to speak of the struggle on Washington Street came to Phil but he put it aside. Kapaloff might have been present that morning but it was obvious that he did not recognize Phil. The bag could have been found by someone who passed the spot later.

Phil decided to leave Kapaloff in doubt on that point for as long as possible, and he was further urged to postpone the clash that might ensue by a faint fear of coming to a showdown with this suave Russian. Nothing would be lost by waiting . . .

Kapaloff allowed a gentle impatience to tinge his manner. "Now about the bag?"

"The three hundred and fifty-five dollars is reward?" Phil asked.

Kapaloff sighed ruefully.

"I am sorry to say it is. Ridiculous, of course, but perhaps you know something of young women. My niece was very fond of the opal ring—a trinket, worth but little. Yet no sooner did she discover her loss than she telephoned the newspaper office and offered the money as reward. Ridiculous! A hundred dollars would be an exaggerated value to place upon everything in the bag. But having made the offer, we shall have to abide by it."

Phil nodded. Kapaloff was lying—no doubt of that—but he wasn't the sort that one baldly denounces. Phil fidgeted and found himself avoiding his visitor's eyes. Then a wave of self-disgust flooded him. "Here I am," he thought, "letting this guy bluff me in my own flat, just because he has a classy front."

He looked into Kapaloff's hazel eyes and asked with perfect casualness, keeping every sign of what was going on in his brain out of his poker-player's face: "And how did the scrap in the automobile come out? I didn't see the end of it."

"I am so glad you said that!" Kapaloff cried, his face alight with joyous relief. "So very glad! Now I can offer my apologies for my childish attempts at deception. You see, I wasn't sure that you had seen the unfortunate occurrence—you could have found the bag later—although I was told that someone had tried to interfere. You were not injured seriously?" His voice was weighted with solicitude.

None of the bewilderment, chagrin, recognition of defeat that raged in Phil's brain showed in his face. He tried to match the other's blandness. "Not at all. A slight headache next morning, a sore spot for a few hours—nothing to speak of."

"Splendid!" Kapaloff exclaimed. "Splendid! And I want to thank you for your attempt to assist my niece, even though I must assure you it was most fortunate you were unsuccessful. We certainly owe you an explanation—my niece and I—and if you will bear with me I shall try not to take up too much of your time with it. We are Russians—my niece and I—and when the Czar's

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government collapsed our place in our native land was gone. Kapaloff was not our name then; but what is a title after the dynasty upon which it depends and the holdings accruing to it are gone? What we endured between the beginning of the revolution and our escape from Russia I pray may never come to another!"

A cloud touched his face with anguish, but he brushed it away with a gesture of one delicate hand.

"My niece saw her father and her fiancé struck down within ten minutes. For months after that the real world did not exist for her. She lived in a nightmare. We watched her night and day for fear that she would succeed in her constant efforts to destroy herself. Then, gradually, she came back to us. For six months she has been, we thought, well. The alienists assured us that she was permanently cured.

"And then, late Monday night, she found between the pages of an old book a photograph of Kondra—he was her betrothed—and the poor child's mind snapped again. She fled from the house, crying that she must go back to Petrograd, to Kondra. I was out, but my valet and my secretary followed her, caught her somewhere in the city, and returned with her. The roughness with which your gallantry was met—for that I must beg your forgiveness. Serge and Mikhail have not yet learned to temper their zeal. To them I am still 'His Excellency,' in whose service anything may be done."

Kapaloff stopped, as if waiting for Phil's comment, but Phil was silent. His brain was telling him, over and over, "This bird has got you licked! The generosity of the reward isn't accounted for by this tale, but it will be before he's through."

His genial eyes still on Phil's, Kapaloff fulfilled the prophesy. "After my niece was safely home and I heard what had happened, I had the advertisement put in the paper. It seemed the most promising way of learning the extent of the injury to the man who had tried to aid my niece. If he were unhurt and had found the bag, he would turn it over to the *Chronicle,* and the three hundred and fifty dollars would be little enough reward for his trouble. On the other hand, if he were seriously injured he would use the advertisement to get in touch with me and I could take further steps to provide for him. If the bag were found by someone else I would remain in ignorance; but you will readily understand that I had no desire to have my niece's distressing plight paraded before the public in the newspapers."

He paused, waiting again for Phil to speak.

When the pause had become awkward Phil shifted in his chair and asked, "And your niece—how is she now?"

"Apparently well again. I called a physician as soon as she returned.

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She was given an opiate and awoke that afternoon as if nothing unusual had happened. It may be that she will never be troubled again."

Phil started to get up from his chair to get the bag. There seemed to be no tangible reason for doubting the Russian's story—except that he did not want to believe it. But was the story flawless?

He relaxed in the chair again. If the tale were true, would Kapaloff have dictated the advertisement so that the bag would be delivered to the *Chronicle*? Wouldn't he have wanted to interview the finder?

The Russian was waiting for Phil to speak, and Phil had nothing to say. He wanted time to think this affair over carefully, away from the glances of the hazel eyes that were lancet-keen for all their blandness.

"Mr. Kapaloff," he said hesitantly, "here is how all this stands with me: I saw the bag's owner and found it under—well—funny circumstances. Not," he interjected quickly, as Kapaloff's eyebrows rose, "that your explanation is hard to believe; but I want to be sure I'm doing the right thing. So I'll have to ask you either to let me deliver the bag to your niece, or to go to the police, tell our stories, and let them straighten it out."

Kapaloff appeared to turn the offers over in his mind. Then he objected: "Neither alternative is inviting. The first would subject my niece to an embarrassing interview, and so soon after her trouble. The second—you should appreciate my distaste for the publicity that would follow the police's entry into the affair."

"I'm sorry, but—" Phil began, but Kapaloff cut him short by rising to his feet, smiling genially, with outstretched hand.

"Not at all, Mr. Truax. You are a man of judgment. In your position I should probably act in like manner. Can you accompany me to call upon my niece now?"

Phil stood up and grasped the dainty hand extended to him, and though the Russian's grip was light enough Phil could feel the swell of powerful muscles under the soft skin.

"I'm sorry," Phil lied, "but I have an engagement within half an hour. Perhaps you and your niece will be in the neighborhood within a few days and will find it convenient to call for it?"

He did not intend dealing with this man on alien ground.

"That will do nicely. Shall we say, at three tomorrow?"

Phil repeated, "At three tomorrow," and Kapaloff bowed himself out.

Alone, Phil sat down and tried to torture his brain into giving him the solution of this puzzle; but he made little headway. Except in two minor instances the Russian's story had been impregnable. And those two details—the fact that he did not want the police dragged into the affair, and the fact that he had word-

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ed the advertisement so as to retain his anonymity behind the screen of the newspaper—were not, on close examination, conclusive.

On the other hand, insanity was notorious as a mask for villainy. How many crimes had been committed by use of the pretext that the victim, or the witnesses, were insane!

Kapaloff's manner had been candid enough and his poise had survived every twist of the situation, but . . . It was upon this last that Phil hung his doubts. "If that bird had contradicted me just once I'd believe him, maybe; but he was too damned agreeable!"

Phil returned home early that night. The cards had failed to hold him, now that his mind was occupied with what threatened to be a larger, more intricate game. He puzzled over the letter in Russian, but its characters meant nothing to his eyes. He tried to think of someone who could translate it for him; but the only Russian he knew was not a man to be trusted under any circumstances. He tried to read a magazine, but soon gave it up and crawled into bed, to toss about, smoke numerous cigarettes, and finally drop off to sleep.

The least expert of burglars would have laughed at the difficulty and resultant noise with which the two men opened the door of Phil's flat; but not the most desperate of criminals would have found anything laughable in their obvious determination. They were bent upon getting into the flat, and the racket incidental to their bungling attacks on the lock disconcerted them not at all. It was quickly evident they would force an entrance even if it were necessary to batter the door down.

Finally the lock succumbed, but by that time Phil was flattened behind his bathroom door, with a pistol in his hand and a confident grin on his face. The crudeness of the work on the lock eliminated whatever doubts he had had of his ability to take care of himself.

The outer door swung open but no light came through. The hall light had been extinguished. The hinges creaked a little, but Phil, peering through the slit between the bathroom door and the jamb, could see nothing. A whisper and an answer told him that there were at least two burglars. However noisy the men had been with the door, they were silent enough now. A slight rustling and then silence.

Not knowing where the men were, Phil did not move. A faint click sounded in the bedroom, and a weak, brief reflection from a flashlight showed an empty passageway.

Phil moved soundlessly toward the bedroom. As he reached the door the flashlight went on again and stayed on, its beam fixed on the empty bed. Phil snapped on they lights.

The two men standing beside the

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bed, one on either side, wheeled in unison and took a step forward, to halt before the menace of the weapon in Phil's hand. The men were very similar in appearance: the same bullet heads, the same green eyes under tangled brows, the same sullen mouths and high, broad cheekbones. But the one who held a blackjack in a still uplifted hand was heavier and broader than the other, and the bridge of his nose was dented by a dark scar that ran from cheek to cheek, just under his eyes.

For perhaps two seconds the men stood still. Then the larger man shrugged his enormous shoulders and grunted a syllable to his companion. The momentary confusion left their faces, to be replaced by looks of resolve as they advanced toward Phil.

His brain was racing. Kapaloff's "secretary and valet," of course; and as their indifference to the noises they had made at the door testified to their determination to do what they had come to do at any cost, so now did their indifference to the pistol in Phil's hand. Close to him as they were, he could hardly expect to drop both of them; but even if he did—the whole story would be bound to come out in the police investigation that must follow, and his chance of getting greater profit out of the affair would be blasted.

As the two men, working together like twin parts of a machine, contracted their muscles to spring, Phil hit on the way out. He leaped backward through the bedroom door, whirled, and jumped into the hall, shouting, "Help! Police!"

There was a snarling at the door, a scuffling, and the noise of two men running through the dark hall toward the front door. The laughter that welled up in Phil's throat silenced his shouts; he fired his pistol into the floor and returned to his bedroom.

He laid a chair gently on its side and swept some books and papers from the table to the floor. Then he turned with a wide-eyed semblance of excitement to welcome the callers in various degrees of negligée who came in answer to his bellowing. After a while a policeman came and Phil told his story.

"A noise woke me up and I saw a man in the room. I grabbed my gun and yelled at him, but I forgot to take the safety catch off the gun." With sham sheepishness: "I guess I was kind of scared. He ran out in the hall with me after him. I remembered the safety, then, and took a shot at him, but it was too dark to see whether I hit him. I looked through my stuff and don't think he got anything, so I guess no harm's done."

After the last question had been answered and the last caller had gone, Phil bolted the door and shook hands with himself. "Well, that fixes Mr. Kapaloff's story. And you've got him faded, my boy, so don't let me catch you letting him run a bluff on you again."

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At five minutes past three on Thursday afternoon the Kapaloffs arrived. Romaine Kapaloff acknowledged her uncle's introduction in easy and faultless English, and thanked Phil warmly for his efforts in her behalf Tuesday morning.

Phil found himself holding her hand and straining his self-possession to the utmost to keep from gaping and stammering. The girl—she couldn't have been more than nineteen—was looking up through brown eyes that glowed now with Phil's gray ones, and asking: "And you really weren't hurt?"

To Phil she seemed the loveliest creature he had ever seen. His attempts at extortion seemed mean and sordid. Because he was bitterly ashamed of his attempt to wring profits from her uncle, and was badly rattled, he answered almost gruffly; and in his effort to keep the chaos within him from his face he made it a mask of stupidity.

"Not at all. Really! It was nothing."

Kapaloff stood watching them with the smile of one who sees his difficulties dissipated. Finally their hands fell apart and they sought chairs. There was an awkward pause. Phil knew that though they sat there until nightfall he could not bring up the question of the girl's sanity, demand the corroboration of her uncle's story, which was the excuse for the meeting.

Kapaloff said nothing, sat smiling benignly on girl and boy. The girl glanced at her uncle, as if expecting him to open the conversation, but when he ignored her silent appeal she turned impulsively to Phil, putting out her hand.

"Uncle Boris told you about my—about the trouble?"

Phil nodded, started to reach for the extended hand, thought better of it, and twined his fingers together between his knees.

"Then you know how fortunate it was that your gallantry wasn't successful. I can't understand why you didn't laugh at Uncle Boris' story—it must have sounded fantastic to you. But—Oh, it is horrible! I can never trust myself again, no matter what the doctors say!"

Phil found that he was holding her hand, after all. He looked at Kapaloff, who was smiling sympathetically. Phil and the girl stood up, and for an instant her eyes held a baffling undertone of pleading. Then it was gone, and she was turning to her uncle.

Phil had but one idea in his mind now: to hand over the bag, get rid of these people, and be alone with his shame and disgust. He moved toward the door.

"I'll get the bag," he said in a tired, weak voice.

A silver purse that dangled from the girl's wrist clattered to the floor. As Phil turned his head at the sound, Kapaloff bent to pick up the purse, and Romaine Kapaloff's eyes met Phil's. For an infinitesimal part

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of a second her eyes burned into his as they had Tuesday morning, and stark terror wiped out the smooth young beauty of her face.

Then her uncle was holding out the purse, her face was composed again, and Phil was walking toward his bedroom door with the blood pounding in his temples. He sat on the top of his trunk, gnawed a thumbnail, and thought desperately. Then he took the bag from the trunk and thrust it under his coat and returned to his guests.

"It is gone."

Kapaloff's urbanity seemed about to desert him. His face darkened and he took a swift step forward. Then he was master of himself again, and was asking pleasantly, "Are you positive?"

"You may look if you like."

Phil went to the telephone and a few seconds later was talking to the desk sergeant at the precinct station.

"A burglar got in here last night. One of your men was in afterward, and I told him I hadn't missed anything. Now I find that a lady's handbag is gone . . . All right."

He turned from the telephone to the Kapaloffs.

"I woke up some time this morning and found two burglars in the room. They escaped, and I thought everything was safe. I forgot about the bag, and didn't look to see if it was still here. I'm sorry."

Neither of the Kapaloffs gave any indication of previous knowledge of the burglary. Boris Kapaloff said evenly, "Very unfortunate, but the bag and its contents were not so valuable that we should worry unduly over the loss."

"I am going to the police station this afternoon to give a description of the bag. Shall I tell them that it is your property and have them turn it over to you?"

"If you will be so kind. Our address is LaJolla Avenue, Burlingame.

Conversation lagged. Several times Kapaloff seemed about to speak, but each time he restrained himself. The girl's eyes, when Phil met them, held a question which he made no attempt to answer.

The Kapaloffs departed. Phil shook hands with both of them, answering the girl's unspoken question with a quick pressure.

When they were gone, he withdrew the bag, counted $355 from the bills in his pocket, and put the money in the bag. Then he drew a deep breath. That was the end of three years of searching for an "easy living."

Since his discharge from the army he had been drifting, finding himself at odds with the world, gambling, doing chores for political clubs—never doing anything very vicious, perhaps, but steadily becoming more and more enmeshed in the underworld. As he looked back now, with the memory of his shame and self-disgust of a few minutes ago still fresh, he thought that he

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would not feel quite so worthless if there has been some outstanding crime in his past, instead of a legion of petty deeds.

Well, that was all past! After this tangle came to an end he would get a job and go back to the ways he had known before the war interrupted his aspirations.

He wrapped the bag in heavy paper, tied it, and sealed it securely. Then he took it downtown and turned it over to the friendly proprietor of a poolroom to be put in the safe.

For two days Phil kept to his rooms—days in which he sprang to the telephone at the first tingling of the bell. He tried to reach Romaine Kapaloff by telephone, got her house, and was told by a harsh voice in broken English that she was not at home. Three times he tried it, but the results were always the same. Then he tried to talk to her uncle, and got the same answer.

On the second night he slept hardly at all. He would doze and then spring into wakefulness, imagining that the bell had sounded, race to the telephone, to be asked, "What number are you calling?"

Then he decided to wait no longer. When a man's luck is running good he should force the issue—not wait in idleness until his fortunes turn . . .

In Burlingame, Phil easily found the Kapaloff's house. At the first garage where he inquired, the name was unknown, but they knew where "the Russians" lived. Even in the dark he had no difficulty in recognizing the house from the garage-man's description.

He drove past it, left his borrowed car in the darkest shadow he could find, and returned afoot. The building loomed immense in the night, a great gray structure set in a park, ringed by a tall iron fence overgrown with hedging. The nearest house was at least half a mile away.

No light came from the house, and Phil found the front gate locked. He crossed the road and squatted under a tree some two hundred feet away. His plan involved nothing further than waiting in the vicinity until he saw Romaine, found some means of communicating with her, or found an avenue through which his luck could carry him toward a solution of whatever mystery existed in the house across the road.

The chances were that Romaine was a prisoner; otherwise she would have got word to him before this. His watch registered 10:15.

He waited.

When his watch said 1:30 his youth and his faith in his luck overcame his patience. A man might as well be home in bed as sitting out here waiting for something to turn up. When a man's luck is running good . . .

He skirted the hedge-grown fence until he found a tree with a branch that grew over the barrier. He climbed the tree, crawled out on

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the overhanging limb, swung for a minute, and dropped.

He landed on hands and knees in soft, moist loam. Carefully he moved forward, keeping a cluster of bushes between himself and the house. When he reached the bushes he halted. Nothing that might serve to conceal him was between the bushes and the building, and he was afraid to trust himself out in the pale starlight.

Again he waited.

Three-quarters of an hour passed, and then he heard the sound of metal scraping against wood. He could see nothing. The sound came again and he identified it: someone was opening a shutter, cautiously, stopping at each sound the bolt made.

A babel of dogs' voices broke out at the rear of the house, and around the corner swept a pack of great hounds, to throw themselves frenziedly against one of the lower windows.

Phil heard the shutter slam sharply. In the wake of the dogs a man stumbled. The shutter opened again and Kapaloff leaned out to speak to the man in the yard. Above the men's words Phil heard Romaine Kapaloff's voice, raised in anger. In the rectangle of light shining from the window six wolfhounds were twisting and leaping—not the sedate, finely bred borzois of my lady's promenade, but great, shaggy wolf-killers of the steppes, over half a man's height from ground to shoulder, and more than a hundred pounds each of fighting machinery.

Phil held his breath, shrunk behind his screen, and prayed that what he had heard somewhere of these wolf-hounds hunting by sight and not by scent be true, that his presence escape their noses.

Kapaloff withdrew his head and closed the shutter. The man in the yard shouted at the dogs. They followed him to the rear of the house. A door closed, shutting off the dogs' voices. Phil was damp with perspiration, but he knew now that the dogs were kept indoors.

From an upper story came a muffled scream and the sound of something falling against a shutter. Then silence. The sound had come from the front of the house, Phil decided—the corner room on the third floor, at a guess.

For a moment Phil was tempted to leave the place and enlist the services of the police; but he was not used to allying himself with the police—on the few occasions when he had had dealings with the law he had found it on the other side. Then, too, would not the glib Kapaloff have the advantage of his aristocratic manner, his standing as a property holder, and his seemingly secure position in the world?

Against all this Phil would have only his bare word and a vague story, backed by three years of living without what the police call "visible means of support." He could imagine what the outcome

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would be. He would have to play this hand out alone.

He left the protecting bush and crept to the front of the house. Around the corner he paused to scan the building. So far as he could determine in the dark every window was fitted with a shutter. He was afraid to try the shutters on the first floor; but it was unlikely that one of them would have been left unbolted.

The upper windows held out the best promise of an entrance. He crept up on the porch, removed his shoes, and stuck them in his hip pockets. Mounting the porch rail, he encircled a pillar with arms and legs and pulled himself up until his fingers caught the edge of the porch roof. Silently he drew himself up and lay face down on the shingles. No sound came from house or grounds. On hands and knees he went to each of the four windows and tried the shutters. All were securely fastened.

He sat up and studied the third-story windows. The window on the extreme left should open into the room from which the last noises had come—Romaine Kapaloff's room, if his reasoning was correct. A rainspout ran up the corner of the house, within arm's length of the window. If the spout would support him, he could reach the window and risk a signal to the girl. He crawled over and inspected the spout, testing it with his hands. It shook a bit but he decided to risk it.

He found a niche for the stocking-toes of one foot, drew himself up, reached for a higher hold on the spout with his hands, and felt for a support for the other foot. There was a tearing noise, a rattle of tin, and Phil thumped to the roof of the porch with a length of pipe in his hands.

He rolled over, let go the spout, and caught at the roof in time to keep from going over the edge. The released piece of tin hit the roof with a clang and rolled over the edge to clatter madly on the paved walk.

The night was suddenly filled with the snarling of hounds. The pack careened around the corner, flung themselves against the porch, tore up and down the yard—lithe, evil shapes in the starlight, with flashing, dripping jaws. Peeping over the edge of the roof, Phil saw a man following the dogs, and a gleam of metal in the man's hands.

A sound came from behind Phil. A second-story shutter was being opened. He wormed his way to it and lay on his back under it, close to the wall. The shutter swung open and a man leaned out—the man with the scarred face.

Phil lay motionless, not breathing, his body tense, a forefinger tight around the trigger of his pistol, the pistol's muzzle not six inches from the body slanting over him.

The man called a question to the one in the yard. The front door opened and Kapaloff's easy voice sounded. The man at the window

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and the one in the yard called to Kapaloff in Russian; he answered.

Then the man at the window withdrew, his footsteps receded, and a door closed within the room. The window remained open. Phil was over the sill in an instant, and in the dark room. As his feet touched the floor he sensed something amiss, heard a grunt, and lunged blindly forward. The room filled with dancing lights, and there was a roaring in his ears . . .

Phil awoke with his nostrils stinging from ammonia administered by the man with the scarred face. Phil tried to push the bottle away, but his hands were lashed. His feet, too, were tied.

He looked around, turning his head from side to side. He was lying on a bed in a luxuriously furnished chamber, fully clothed except for coat and shoes.

Kapaloff stood across the room, looking on with a smile of mild mockery. On one side of the bed stood the man with the scar; on the opposite side, the other man who had entered Phil's flat. At a word from Kapaloff this man assisted Phil to a sitting position.

Phil's head ached cruelly; but taking his cue from Kapaloff, he tried to keep his face composed, as if he found nothing disconcerting in his position. Kapaloff came over to the bed and asked solicitously, "You are not seriously injured this time either, I trust?"

"I don't think so. But if these hired men of yours keep it up they'll wear my head away."

Kapaloff exhibited his teeth in an affable smile. "You are the fortunate possessor of a tough head. But I hope it will not prove as little amenable to persuasion as it has been to force."

Phil said nothing. Every iota of his will was needed to keep his face calm. The pain in his head was unbearable. Kapaloff went on talking, his voice a mixture of friendliness and banter.

"Your tenacity in clinging to the bag would, under other circumstances, be admirable; but really it must be terminated. I must insist that you tell me where it is."

"Suppose my head stays tough on the inside, too?" Phil suggested.

"That would be most unfortunate. But you are going to be reasonable, aren't you? When you stumbled into this affair you saw, or suspected, much that did not appear on the surface—being an extremely perspicacious young man—and thought you could unearth whatever was hidden and exact a little—well, not blackmail, perhaps, though a crude intellect might call it that. Now you must see that I have the advantage; and assuredly you are enough the sportsman to acknowledge defeat, and make what terms you can."

"And what are the terms?"

"Turn the bag over to me and sign a few papers."

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"Papers for what?"

"Oh, the papers are unimportant merely a precaution. You will not know what they contain exactly—just a few statements supposedly made by you: confessions to certain crimes, perhaps—to insure me that you will not trouble the police afterward. I am frank. I do not know where you have put the bag. After you so obligingly entered the window that Mikhail left open for you, Mikhail and Serge visited your rooms again. They found nothing. So I offer terms. The bag, your signature, and you receive five hundred dollars, exclusive of the money that was in the bag."

"Suppose I don't like the terms?"

"That would be *most* unfortunate," Kapaloff protested. "Serge"—motioning toward the man who had helped Phil sit up—"is remarkably adept with a heated knife; and remembering the ludicrous manner in which you put him and Mikhail to rout, I fancy he would relish having you as a subject for his playfulness."

Phil turned his head and pretended to look at Serge, but he scarcely saw the man. He was trying to convince himself that this threat was a bluff, that Kapaloff would not dare resort to torture; but his success was slight. If his ability to read men was of any value at all then this Russian was one who would stop at nothing to attain his ends.

Phil decided he would not submit to any excruciating pain to save the bag. In the first place, he did not know how valuable the paper might be; secondly, he seemed to be the girl's only ally, and he flattered himself that he was more valuable an aid than a letter could be. However, he would fight to the last inch—bluff until the final moment.

"I can't make terms until I talk with your niece."

Kapaloff expostulated gently but firmly. "That is not possible. I am sorry, but you must understand that my position is very delicate, and I cannot permit it to become more complicated."

"No talk, no terms," Phil said flatly.

Kapaloff let his distress furrow his brow. "Think it over. You must know that I shall not be pleased by the necessity of making you suffer. In fact"—with a whimsical smile—"Serge will be the only participant who will enjoy it."

"Bring on the knife," Phil said coolly. "No talk, no terms."

Kapaloff nodded to Serge, who left the room.

"There is no hurry—a few minutes' delay doesn't matter," Kapaloff urged. "Consider your position. Think! Under Serge's skilled hands you will tell—do not doubt it—but then you lose the extra five hundred dollars, besides causing me no little anguish—to say nothing of your own plight."

Phil's smile matched Kapaloff's for affability. "It would be just wast-

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ing time. If I can't see Miss Kapaloff I'll stand pat."

Serge returned with an alcohol lamp and a small poniard. He set the lamp on the table, lit it, and held the blade in the flame.

Phil watched the preparations with a face that was tranquil. He noticed, suddenly, that the hand holding the poniard trembled, and, raising his eyes, he saw tiny globules of moisture glistening on Serge's forehead. His face was haggard, with white lines around the mouth.

Mikhail put Phil down on the bed again, gripping his ankles firmly. Phil said nothing. He was beginning to enjoy himself—knowing that he could stop the whole thing with a word. Serge's knees were trembling noticeably now; and Mikhail's fingers around Phil's ankles jerked and were moist with perspiration.

Phil grinned and spoke banteringly to Kapaloff. "You should rehearse these men of yours. I bet their torturing is not better than their burglary."

Kapaloff chuckled good-naturedly. "But you must consider that a bungling torturer may obtain effects that are beyond a skilled one."

Then Serge came to the bed, the poniard glowing in his shaking hand.

Phil spoke casually, "If you don't mind, I'd like to sit up and watch this."

"Certainly!" Kapaloff himself assisted him to a sitting position. "Is there anything else I can do to make it more bearable?"

"Thanks, no. I can manage nicely now."

Serge was extending the heated dagger toward the soles of Phil's feet, from which Mikhail had removed the stockings. The blade was wavering in the man's nervous hands; his eyes were bulging, and his face was wet with perspiration. Mikhail's fingers were pressing into Phil's ankles, grinding the flesh painfully; both of Kapaloff's assistants were breathing hoarsely.

Phil forced himself to disregard the pain of Mikhail's grip, and smiled derisively. The point of the poniard was within an inch of his feet. Then Serge let it fall to the floor, and shrank back from the bed. Kapaloff spoke to him. Slowly Serge stooped for the poniard, and went to the lamp to reheat it, his body quivering as with ague.

He came to the bed again, his teeth clenched behind taut, bloodless lips. He bent over the bed, and Phil felt the heat of the approaching blade. Lazily he glanced at Kapaloff, carrying his acting to its pinnacle just before surrendering.

Then, with a choking cry, Serge flung the poniard from him and dropped on his knees before Kapaloff, pleading pitifully. Kapaloff answered with exaggerated gentleness, as one would speak to an infant. Serge got to his feet slowly, and backed away, his head hanging. One of Kapaloff's hands came

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out of his pocket, holding a pistol. The pistol spat flame. Serge caught both hands to his body, and crumpled to the floor.

Kapaloff walked unhurriedly to where the man had fallen, put the toe of one trim shoe under Serge's shoulder, and turned him over on his back. Then, the pistol hanging loosely at his side, he sent four bullets into Serge's face, wiping out the features in a red smear.

Kapaloff turned and looked, with eyes that held nothing but polite expectation, at Mikhail. Mikhail had released Phil's ankles at the first shot, and now stood erect, his hands at his sides.

For a full minute Kapaloff looked at Mikhail, and then turned back to the figure at his feet. A drop of blood glistened on the toe of the shoe with which he had turned the man over. Carefully he rubbed the foot against the dead man's side until the blood was gone. Then he spoke to Mikhail, who lifted the lifeless form in his powerful arms and left the room.

Kapaloff pocketed his pistol and a courteously apologetic smile appeared on his face—as if he were a housewife who had been compelled to rebuke a maid in the presence of a guest. Phil was sick and giddy with horror, but he forced himself to accept the challenge of the smile, and said with a fair semblance of amusement: "You shouldn't have misinformed me about Serge's love for the hot knife."

Kapaloff chuckled. "The persuasion is postponed until tomorrow. I am afraid I shall have to leave you bound. Ordinarily I should simply leave Mikhail to guard you; but I am not sure that I can trust him now. Serge was his brother."

He picked up the lamp and the poniard.

"The distressing scene you have just seen should at least convince you of my earnestness." Then he left the room and the key turned in the lock.

(*continued on page 92*)

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* published monthly at Concord, New Hampshire, for October 1, 1959.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MICHAEL INNES**
TITLE:	***Policeman's Holiday***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Sir John Appleby
LOCALE:	England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Appleby and his wife were touring historic houses in the West Country. In Roydon Abby there was a famous El Greco that Lady Appleby was anxious to see . . .*

A MOTOR TOUR IN THE WEST COUNtry makes it possible to visit any number of historic houses. Having done Montacute that morning, and being pledged to do Barrington Court in the afternoon, Sir John Appleby rather hoped to slip past Roydon Abbey without stopping. But his wife would have nothing of this.

"There's a famous El Greco," she said. "Turn in."

So they turned in.

Lord Roydon's country seat was imposing but not exactly flourishing. The house could have done with a lick of paint, and the grounds with a few more gardeners. Perhaps his lordship was something of an absentee owner. Certainly there was no flag flying, so presumably he wasn't lurking on the premises.

But this made it only the more certain that the Applebys would be allowed to look around. Sir John foresaw another long tramp through a succession of chilly splendors. But Lady Appleby was adamant as she closed the guidebook she had been consulting.

"There's nothing about its being open to the public," she said. "So you'd better get out a ten-bob note."

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"Quite so." Appleby was resigned. "You said an El Greco?"

"Yes. The *Beggar With Skull*."

"Good Lord!" Appleby was impressed. "I'll certainly put down ten bob to see that."

They were received by the housekeeper, a myopic old woman who appeared well used to the job. She stood them in the middle of a vast paneled hall and began her lecture.

"The family is of great antiquity," she said. "Doutremeres have lived on this spot for more than nine hundred years. But his lordship is not in residence at present."

Appleby reflected that this break with tradition was a pity. But Judith Appleby seemed possessed of some relevant information.

"Isn't Lord Roydon a great yachtsman?" she prompted.

The old housekeeper beamed. The present Marquis was certainly much distinguished in that line. The Abbey, of course, was only a few miles from the sea, and he had been brought up to sailing from boyhood.

His yachting was of an adventuresome and often lonely kind. He would go off with a one-man crew, or with no crew at all, for weeks on end. That was what he was doing now.

"Of course," the housekeeper purred, "his lordship has the magnificent physique of all the Doutremeres. It's in the blood, I say. And here is his portrait, presented by the tenantry on the occasion of his lordship's giving up active command."

Appleby and Judith looked with due respect at the portrait. Lord Roydon had a red face and a red beard, and he had been painted against a red sky in what appeared to be the uniform of a Vice-Admiral of the Fleet. As the artist had somehow contrived to indicate that his subject wasn't much short of seven feet tall, the effect was altogether impressive.

"And next to him is his brother, Lord Charles Doutremere."

With suitably modified awe the Applebys looked at this portrait too. Lord Charles was another giant. He was depicted in profile as clean-shaven, florid, and in garments appropriate to shooting things. He looked, indeed, quite as if he would shoot anything on sight. A red setter was eyeing him apprehensively from the bottom left-hand corner.

"His lordship—" the housekeeper began, and then broke off. "But here he is," she added in a lower voice, and in some confusion. "He's come back."

It was certainly true. Lord Roydon, in untidy nautical kit, had strode past the screen at the bottom of the hall. Seeing the Applebys, he gave a brisk bow, barked out a "Good morning," and marched on, civilly enough. But suddenly Lord Roydon stopped dead in his tracks and pointed at an empty space on the wall.

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"Mrs. Cumpsty," he snapped, "what's become of the El Greco?"

"The El Greco, my lord? Why, it hasn't come back since you took it away."

"Since I took it away! What the devil are you talking about?"

Mrs. Cumpsty stared. "Why, three weeks ago, my lord—the last time you were here. You had a word with me here in the hall, my lord. And then you took away the picture—" Mrs. Cumpsty faltered, as she well might in face of the enraged appearance of her employer. "And then you took away the picture, saying you were going to have it cleaned in London."

"Absolute nonsense! You're mad, Mrs. Cumpsty—or in league with some scoundrel of a thief. I haven't been near the Abbey for six weeks."

Mrs. Cumpsty—very naturally—began to weep. And Sir John Appleby stepped forward and introduced himself. It was clearly going to be a case for the police.

The housekeeper stuck to her story. She was quite certain that it had been Lord Roydon himself who had taken away El Greco's *Beggar With Skull*. His lordship had been most affable and had chatted about various Abbey affairs in a manner that no impostor could have managed. If there had been the slightest cause for suspicion she certainly wouldn't have let the picture be taken out of the house. Didn't she know that it was worth far more than everything else in the house put together?

Appleby inquired whether anyone else had been aware of Lord Roydon's—or the supposed Lord Roydon's—visit. The whole household had of course heard of it. But only one of the Abbey's two footmen had actually set eyes on him—having admitted him in the first place and then been sent to summon Mrs. Cumpsty. This young man also was certain that it had been Lord Roydon. It was impressive corroboration—even though this footman, it developed, had not been long in his place.

Appleby persevered, vigorously backed by Lord Roydon himself who was now in a state of near-frenzy. All the indoor servants were interrogated, and then all the outdoor ones. None of them had been aware of the visit until it was over. Lord Roydon admitted that there was nothing surprising about this. He did from time to time come and go in an unobtrusive way. In fact, he was something of a recluse. All the Doutremeres were.

This last was a statement to which Appleby appeared to give some thought. And then he asked a question. "Anybody else? Can you think, sir, of anybody else we ought to question?"

Lord Roydon considered for a moment. "The children," he barked. "Half a dozen about the place—gardeners' kids, and so forth. Sharp nippers."

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It was an astute suggestion—and it bore astonishing fruit. The fourth child questioned was a small boy called Alf who confessed, amid tears and surprising terror, that he had indeed seen Lord Roydon. He had seen him while playing near a little frequented cart-track through the park. His lordship had been preparing to drive away in an unfamiliar car. Alf appeared to brace himself at this point in his narrative.

"But first, sir, 'e stopped and took 'is beard off."

"Dear me!" Appleby said mildly. "Did you ever see his lordship do that before, Alf?"

"No, sir." Alf gulped. "But then 'e saw me a-watching, sir. And 'e come after me and said 'e'd break my jaw if ever I told on 'im."

"And you're sure that you've never seen this man with the false beard before?"

Alf shook his head. "No, sir. But I'd know 'im again. I'd know 'im by the big scar on 'is chin."

"That will do!" Surprisingly, Lord Roydon seized the small boy and ran him out of the hall. Then he turned to Appleby. "The matter is not to be pursued," he said curtly. "Be good enough to consider it closed."

But Appleby had turned to the portrait of Lord Roydon's brother, Lord Charles Doutremere—the portrait painted in profile. "I think not," he said grimly.

Lord Charles was indeed a more than typical Doutremere recluse. He lived in a remote cottage some twenty miles away, attended by only a single manservant. And the man, although respectful to Lord Roydon, was reluctant to admit them.

"Lord Charles's condition is still critical," he said. "The doctor says there should be no visitors, my lord."

Lord Roydon's eyes became worried. "Critical? What the devil do you mean?"

"A hunting accident a month ago, my lord. Lord Charles insisted you shouldn't be told. He spoke"—the man hesitated—"he spoke of the bad blood between you, my lord."

Appleby gave Lord Roydon a single glance, and turned again to the man. "Just what sort of hunting accident?"

"To the spine, sir. Lord Charles hasn't been able to stir from his bed for over a month."

It was a couple of hours later and the Applebys were now on their way to inspect Barrington Court—much as if nothing had happened.

"I still don't really understand," Judith Appleby said.

"Lord Roydon planned to sell his El Greco secretly—and at the same time collect insurance on it. He shaved. He painted a scar on his jaw. He put on a false beard and spoke to Mrs. Cumpsty. It's not

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surprising the short-sighted old soul was so sure it *was* Lord Roydon, since a beard would only be a beard to her, whether false or authentic. Then, having made off with the painting, his lordship went through that pantomime with poor young Alf. No wonder he had that inspiration about my questioning the children."

"You mean—"

"Yes, he intended to plant the theft very ingeniously on his brother. The plan broke down only because of that hunting accident, which gave the unfortunate Charles an ironclad alibi. Only Lord Roydon, as we heard, knew nothing about it, since the brothers very seldom talked to each other."

"But if Lord Roydon *shaved* his beard—"

"He simply went off in his yacht and waited for it to grow back. And then he turned up at the Abbey again—a few minutes after we did."

Appleby paused, and when he spoke again there was a note of professional admiration and respect in his voice.

"Really quite a remarkable criminal formula. Unique, I think. *X* disguised as *Y* disguised as *X*. Think it out like that."

Appleby glanced at his watch and accelerated. Then he laughed uproariously.

"Or call it," he said, "a notably bare-faced fraud."

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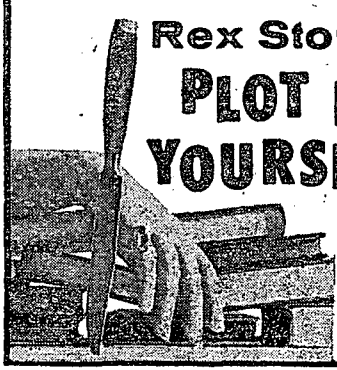

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EDITORS' FILE CABB

AUTHOR: **MIGNON G. EBERHART**

TITLE: ***Mr. Wickwire Adds and Subtracts***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Mr. James Wickwire

LOCALE: A city in the United States

COMMENTS: *It started as a "classic" case: beautiful bride, handsome wedding, lavish gifts—and the groom disappears just after the ceremony! But there were odd complications—like murder and a dying message . . .*

SHE WAS A BEAUTIFUL BRIDE EVEN though her veil was over one small ear, her white satin skirts were crumpled, and she had recently been crying. She held a sort of furry little muff on one arm, her white veil fell mistily over my desk upon which she sat, and she cried out, "He was shot. Right through his bald spot. And Joel has disappeared and the police think he murdered him!"

Perhaps I should explain that she was not my bride. My name is James Wickwire; I am a rather elderly vice-president of a bank and a more or less determined bachelor. This was one of the less determined moments for I could not help both envying Joel, the missing bridegroom, and thinking that he displayed a remarkable lack of enterprise in deserting the bride, if not at the altar, then very shortly afterward.

Happy sat at her feet in an adoring manner. Happy is my dog, a huge, liver-colored creature, and while I would be the last to say he has no faults, he has only one weakness: he falls in love. He gave a wooing murmur as I said, "Now let me get this straight. You were married today—"

"At four o'clock this afternoon. Everybody thought Joel and I were going to Paris but really we had decided to stay for a week in our apartment. We have it all furnished and—" Her voice shook a little. "It

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was such fun. But Joel disappeared right in the foyer of the apartment house and I found his uncle shot, so I came to you because Joel told me you know all about murders."

"My dear young lady! That is, I'll not say that I have not had certain experiences—" I pulled myself together. As matter of fact, I have an old-fashioned aversion to murder. I said, "Joel *who*?"

She eyed me with a touch of impatience. "But I told you! Joel Mallory, of course. I'm Mrs. Joel Mallory—for five hours now. It's his uncle who was shot—"

I sat up. "Do you mean that old Seth Mallory was shot?"

"That's what I've been telling you. He gave Joel a check for twenty thousand dollars for a wedding gift, drawn on your bank. And Joel told me once that he'd heard all about you. He called it your extracurricular activity—murders, I mean. So please find out who murdered Joel's uncle. And please, if you don't mind, I'd like to have Joel back."

She gave a sad little gulp and she was indeed beautiful. There was a twenty-thousand-dollar check drawn on our bank and obviously it was my duty to do something about a murdered client. So I said, "Don't cry, my dear, don't cry—" and found myself holding her in my arms and patting her head while the white veil tickled my nose. At this point the muff on her arm gave a sharp bark and bit me.

I released my bride—or rather young Joel Mallory's bride—and discovered two bright eyes peering from the fur on her arm which was definitely not a muff. Perhaps her unexpected arrival, to say nothing of her unexpected conversation, had distracted me; but Happy had not been so deceived. However, instead of leaping to my defense he crooned infatuatedly at the muff.

"It's a dog," I said, sucking my wound.

"Her name is Lucinda," the bride said coolly. "She's had her shots, so you won't get hydrophobia."

I reflected rather bitterly that it was my hydrophobia, if any, not hers. Happy traitorously sang a love song and I sat down to think.

I had known Seth Mallory for a long time in an impersonal way and had never liked him. He was a mathematical genius, or so he claimed: he lived, breathed, and possibly derived nourishment from figures.

He took endless chances with the stock market and came out a winner often enough to back up his claims to, at least, a certain flair for figures; but there were times when he lost and I was in a position to know when that happened.

He was a shriveled, pinched-up man with a bald head and small eyes set too close together. He had particularly endeared himself to me on more than one occasion by telling me that bankers knew nothing of money or mathematics.

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"If you had the slightest understanding of the science of mathematics, my dear Wickwire" he would say, "you wouldn't be working for a salary."

With which he would pocket a loan to float a new project and I have to admit that he was a good risk, otherwise I could not have approved the loan. But it struck me then that it had been at least a year since he had applied for a loan, which, knowing Seth, seemed rather odd.

I knew Joel less well but I liked him better; he was a well-built, tanned, attractive young man with very direct eyes. He acted as a sort of assistant and legman for his uncle, although I didn't think that Joel knew much of Seth's schemes; and once or twice it had seemed to me that Joel had looked troubled and restive, as if he were pulling at the reins.

There was a secretary too—a man named Timothy Brace—who was mainly a voice over the telephone, although I had a vague recollection of seeing him once or twice—ready, polite, and I had suspected, intelligent. Joel's main claim to intelligence was, so far as I could see, his choice of a bride who at that moment gave a sort of sniffle and wiped the back of her hand childishly across her eyes.

I gave her my handkerchief and told her to tell me the whole story once more. And it did simmer down to a very peculiar story.

The wedding and the reception had gone, I gathered, as merrily as a wedding bell. Then she and Joel had driven to their apartment but once they arrived a slight confusion developed: Joel had put his bride in the elevator, and drawn back, apparently to speak to the doorman or somebody, but he had said—quite definitely, she was sure of that—"You go on up to the apartment. I'll be there in a few minutes." The elevator door had closed and the elevator man had taken her up to the ninth floor.

"Joel couldn't carry me over the threshold but I think that's pretty silly anyway. So I went in. But he didn't come."

She had eyed her new domain with much satisfaction, glanced at some flowers and wondered who had sent them since there was no card and nobody was supposed to know that they intended to spend part of their honeymoon in their own home. Then she had strolled into the bedroom where she looked at herself in the mirror and admired her new wedding ring.

"I'd had rather a lot of champagne," she said frankly. "So I wasn't paying much attention to time or anything, just sort of drowsily thinking about the wedding. But all at once I realized that quite a long time had passed and Joel hadn't arrived; so I went out and—and I was going to look for him in the room we had fixed up for a study"—she gulped again. "And there was his

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uncle. At the desk. Shot right through his head."

"Dear me," I said. "What did you do?"

She had behaved quite sensibly on the whole. She called the elevator man, asked if Joel had returned, and when the man said he hadn't seen him, she sent for the superintendent of the apartment house. The superintendent had called the police.

They had questioned her for a long time. "I told them I didn't know anything about it. I didn't hear any voices, I didn't know Joel's uncle was there until I—I saw him, and I didn't hear a shot. They didn't find a gun and they didn't find Joel, so they think Joel shot him and ran away. So just as soon as I could, I slipped out the back door—I didn't even change my wedding dress because I thought they wouldn't dream I'd go out dressed like this. And I guess they didn't because nobody followed me and I had to bring Lucinda because she'd bite them. And I got a taxi and came to tell you. And to bring you these—"

She shifted Lucinda who snarled at me. Happy besottedly wagged his tail. The bride thrust a check and a piece of paper at me.

The check, on our bank, was duly drawn to Joel Mallory, for twenty thousand dollars, dated that day; it was not endorsed. It suggested only a few facts: one, that while I had not had occasion to look into Seth Mallory's account recently he was obviously, so to speak, well and truly solvent; another, that he had not presented the check to his nephew before his death, so it was possible, although not certain, that he expected to meet his nephew—or his nephew's bride—at the newlyweds' apartment and hand over the check there.

It seemed also clear, from what I knew of Seth Mallory, that he was not likely to hand over that much money for sentimental reasons only.

It also struck me that the bride had given evidence of a certain alacrity in thinking. She said, confirming my hypothesis, "He must have been intending to give it to Joel as soon as we got to the apartment—or to me. So he must have been waiting there. I suppose Joel told him we were going there and gave him a key—we had two or three keys. I saw the check on the desk, so I just picked it up before the police got there. The other piece of paper—well, it was there too; he must have been just sort of scribbling on it, all those doodles don't make any sense; but I brought it too just because—well, I thought it might be a clue."

There were doodles on it, in pencil, certainly. But some of the little marks and scribbles did seem to make sense and, in fact, catapulted me back through the years to college mathematics. Here is what Seth Mallory had doodled:

$$\infty \equiv \{ \surd$$

I then rose, told her that we

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would go to her apartment, and called a taxi.

Happy set up a wail when we left and Lucinda growled. As we went out to the taxi, my bride gathering up her wedding finery lest it sweep the sidewalk, we chanced to encounter the policeman who strolls my street. He gave a violent start, snatched off his cap, and said, "Congratulations, Mr. Wickwire."

The taxi shot away before I could undeceive him, and Lucinda bit me again.

We arrived at the apartment house and went boldly into the front entrance where we were seized upon by several policemen with what amounted to yoicks and tally-ho on their part.

They accompanied us to the honeymoon apartment where, after determining that there was no one lurking in the place, I was at last obliged to telephone a friend who is a very high official in the police department; there wasn't much I could tell him since I didn't really know very much, but I did ask him to call off his watchdogs for, say, an hour.

He gave a kind of moan and said astutely, "I hear there's a deserted bride. Is she pretty?" He then laughed, which was uncalled for, and said, "Okay, Jim. But only for one hour. And—find that bridegroom, will you?"

The policemen duly retired. I made sure the kitchen door was unlocked. I then reflected that an hour was not much time and had a little conversation with the bride, mainly going over ground which the police had already explored. She was prompt and definite in her replies.

The elevator man had told the police that the dead man had come to the apartment about an hour before the bride arrived. It was her own impression that while Seth had attended the wedding reception he had made only a brief appearance. Obviously he had had a key to the apartment.

No one else had been brought up to that floor during the significant hour except a messenger with some flowers—this was a short time after Seth Mallory had arrived. The elevator man had not witnessed the messenger's departure; he had told the messenger, it developed, that he should have used the service elevator, so presumably the messenger had left that way; the service elevator was operated automatically. Owing to the size of the flowers—an enormous basket of gladiolas—the elevator man had not had a clear look at the messenger's face.

Obviously, too, Seth Mallory himself had let in the messenger. There was, as the bride had said, no card.

And all the time I kept one eye on my watch and both ears trained toward the kitchen door, and the automatic service elevator. But as it turned out, Lucinda heard it first and streaked for the kitchen, shrieking in a high soprano.

Joel Mallory walked in in striped

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trousers, black coat, and wilted white carnation, and swept his bride into his arms.

"Darling, I couldn't help it—I was going to tell him I wouldn't go—darling—"

The bride clutched him and wept. I decided to allow sixty seconds for emotion, but in less than thirty the bride strangled her sobs and wailed, "Talk fast, Joel. The police will be back any minute and—and arrest you!"

He gave me a wild glance. I explained my presence rapidly and the bride added a sobbing but accurate footnote.

"Mr. Wickwire had the police called off so you'd have a chance to get into the apartment. He guessed that you'd know of the murder by this time and he knew that the police suspect you, so he hoped you'd take the chance to see me and explain. Darling, where in the world did you go—and why?"

Joel looked distracted.

I said, "Why did your uncle promise you twenty thousand?"

Joel's face cleared. "I was to go to South America and buy a mountain."

"What is on the mountain, darling?" said his bride.

"What is *in* the mountain?" I said.

"I don't know," Joel replied to both of us. "He wouldn't tell me. He said I wasn't to tell anybody and that I was to leave right after the reception. He'd have a hired car waiting right around the corner of the apartment house. I was to be taken straight to the airport; I was to take a check with me and close the deal and he said I'd be back here in a couple of days and that he would explain to you, darling. But then at the wedding and the reception I was miserable thinking about it—"

The bride lifted her head. "I wondered why you kissed that pretty organist," she interpolated thoughtfully.

"—so I decided I just wouldn't do it. That's all. So at the reception I told Uncle Seth I wouldn't. He said, all right but he'd meet me here at the apartment, and told me to send the hired car away before I came up to the apartment. He said he'd give me the twenty thousand anyway and was really very decent about it."

The bride was recovering. "And very smart," she said, not quite gritting her teeth. "He meant to talk you into it anyway, darling. He was going to give me the check and explain and try to make everything all right."

"But, darling, you'd have hated me," Joel said.

"Well," the bride said, "twenty thousand is twenty thousand. Did you find the car?"

"No. It was gone. I looked and looked and by the time I got back to the apartment house the street was jammed with police cars; so I asked the patrolman on the corner what had happened and he told me

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that Seth Mallory had been killed and the police were after his nephew and—well, just as he said that he gave a sort of queer look at my clothes, yanked out his gun, and began to blow his whistle. So," Joel said simply, "I ran."

His bride nodded her pretty head approvingly. "Joel was the best sprinter in the University."

"But of course," Joel said, "I had to come back and—and so I watched my chance and came in through the rear and—"

Time was going far too fast. I said, "What car rental company does your uncle use?"

Joel told me; I telephoned the office; the order for the car had been cancelled at five thirty; beyond the fact that a man's voice had cancelled it over the telephone they could tell me nothing. So that was a dead end.

I said, "Did anyone else know of your projected trip to buy a mountain?"

"I don't think so," Joel said, but he hesitated.

I said, "Who was Seth's new partner?"

"Well," Joel said, "I think that was why he wanted me to go to South America and close the deal. So it would be done, you see, before his partner could stop it. His partner is Charlie Jackman."

I confess that I was disappointed when I heard his name. Yet it explained much. Seth clearly had to have some reservoir of money into which he could dip his avaricious fingers, for he had not applied for any loans for at least a year.

Charlie Jackman was, like Seth, a sort of legend in financial circles, although the only perspicuity Charlie Jackman had ever displayed, to my knowledge, was in being born to millions and hanging on to every penny of them.

How Seth had talked him into an active partnership was not then decipherable or important; the point was that Charlie Jackman would not have been content with Seth's schemes for very long, certainly not when it came to buying a mountain—obviously against Jackman's wishes and with Jackman's money.

Murder, however, seemed a rather violent recourse.

I said shortly, "I am sure the police have questioned Seth's secretary—Timothy Brace, as I remember it. Phone him and ask him to come here at once."

Joel did so while I again studied the piece of paper with the doodles on it.

"He's coming," Joel said presently.

I glanced at my watch—my friend in the police department has a marked affection for promptness.

Only three minutes were left of the hour of grace when Seth's secretary, thin, polite, red-haired, and anxious to please, walked in. He said, "This is a terrible thing, Joel. The only sensible thing to do is give yourself up to the police and clear

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yourself. Surely you must have an alibi."

"No," I said, "he doesn't have an alibi, Mr. Brace, because you cancelled the order for the car and made certain that Joel would be here, not on his way to South America." I paused, and added grimly, "When you shot Seth Mallory."

The secretary turned pale. "This is an outrage! He was my employer. Why—why, I had nothing to gain—"

"He was not your only employer. I suggest that you informed Charlie Jackman of Seth's plan to buy this—er—mountain and that Jackman strongly opposed it—to the extent of telling you that he'd reward you suitably if you stopped the purchase. I suggest that you did stop it—in the only way you could—and that you took some pleasure in doing it because you hated Seth Mallory. You aimed the gun at him and told him what you were going to do before you shot him. As a matter of fact, I can't imagine anybody working for Seth and not hating him," I said frankly. "But murder is really going too far. In any event, Seth outsmarted you, Mr. Brace. He left a perfectly clear record of the murder. Don't think that Jackman will protect you—the instant he's questioned he'll throw you overboard to save himself. So I suggest—"

At this moment, on the dot, the door flung open and policemen and plainclothesmen entered the room with considerable zeal. The movement was spearheaded by my friend in the police department who gave us one look and said, "Is this the murderer?"

Brace screamed, "This is an outrage! You have no proof—"

"Oh, yes," I said, handing the scribbled piece of paper to my friend. "Seth told us."

I pointed to the hieroglyphics and scrawls on the paper which, in sequence, were:

$$\infty \equiv \{ \surd$$

"Here is ∞, a mathematical symbol meaning infinity—or, translated, death. Here is $\equiv$, a mathematical symbol meaning: is identical with. And here is $\{$, which means, simply, brace—obviously, under the circumstances, the name of the murderer.

"And that is not all. Here is $\surd$, the radical sign which might be loosely translated in our idiom as red—or red-haired. In other words, Seth Mallory told us that his death is identical with a red-haired Brace. Could the dying message have been any clearer?—remember, it was written by a mathematician.

"However, I fancy you'll have more solid proof when you find the gun and when you discover the florist who sold Brace the flowers—by which he shielded his face, holding the flowers in front of it, from the elevator man. Whoever sold him the flowers can undoubtedly identify him. He intended Joel to take the rap, of course, so he cancelled

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the car which would have removed Joel from the scene of the murder. But I suggest that your most valuable witness may be Jackman."

I turned to Brace. "What *is* in the mountain?"

I never found out—for at this point Brace made a determined effort to get away and Joel let loose one of his athletic fists with the result that Brace had to be carried out unconscious.

Some time later—when I left—the bride kissed me warmly. And then she said, "By the way—the check, Mr. Wickwire."

I had forgotten it, so I hastened to hand it over. She then turned to Joel. "Darling, it's past time for you to walk Lucinda."

We went down together in the elevator. The last I saw of Joel was his large, muscular figure at the end of Lucinda's leash, looking somewhat sheepish, which induced a dismal mental picture of Joel walking Lucinda year after year after year—the dog looked extremely healthy.

When I reached home Happy demanded a walk on his part, but that was quite different. No bride had ordered me to walk him.

Indeed, I was musing contentedly on my lonely state when a French poodle strolled past, and Happy promptly fell in love again.

He dragged me in pursuit all around the block and unfortunately we again encountered our neighborhood patrolman. The young lady leading the poodle cried indignantly, "Officer, this man is following me!"

She and the poodle sailed on. The policeman said reprovingly, "But Mr. Wickwire, you were just married!"

By exerting all my strength I dragged Happy back home where I closed—and on second thought—locked all the doors.

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STATE OF ASSASSINATION

by POUL ANDERSON

HIS NAMES WERE LEGION AND HIS face was anybody's. Because a Senator was being hunted, I stood on a corner and waited for him.

The arm gun was a slight, annoying drag under my tunic. Lord knew it should be almost a part of me after so many years, but today I had the jaggers. It's always harder on the nerves to defend than to stalk. There was a vending machine close by, and I might have bought a reefer, or even a cigarette, to calm me down; but I can't smoke. I got a whiff of chlorine several years ago, during an assassination in Morocco, and the transplanted lung tissue I now use is a bit cranky. Nor did my philosophical tricks work: meditation on the *koans* of Zen, recital of elementary derivatives and integrals.

I was alone at the stop. In some towns, where private autos haven't yet been banned from congested areas, I would have been in trouble. Here, only the pedestrians and an occasional electroshuttle blocked my view, kittycorner across the intersection of Grant and Jefferson to the bar known as The Sword Called Precious Pearl. I stood as if waiting for a particular ride. A public minivid was on the wall behind me, and after a while I decided it wouldn't hurt to see if anything had happened. Not that I expected it yet. The Senator's escorted plane was still airborne. I hardly thought the enemy would have got a bomb aboard. Still—

I dropped a coin in the box and turned the dials in search of a newscast.

"—development was inevitable, toward greater and greater ferocity. For example, we think of the era between the Peace of Westphalia and the French Revolution as one of limited conflicts. But Heidelberg and Poltava suffice to remind us how easily they got out of hand.

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Likewise, the relative chivalry of the post-Napoleonic nineteenth century evolved into the trench combat of the First World War, the indiscriminate aerial bombings of the Second, and the atomic horrors of the Third."

Interested, I leaned closer to the little screen. The speaker was a fortyish man with sharp, intelligent features. I liked his delivery, vivid without being sentimental. I couldn't quite place him, though, so I thumbed the info switch. He disappeared for a moment while a sign in the screen told me this was a filmed broadcast of an address by Juan Morales, the new president of the University of California, on the topic: *Clausewitz's Analysis Reconsidered*.

It was refreshing to hear a college president voice something besides noises about Education in the Post-Nuclear Age. I recalled, now, that Morales was a historian of note, and moderately active in the Libertarian Party. Doubtless the latter experience had taught him to speak with vigor. The fact that the Enterprise Party had won the last election seemed only to have honed him more fine-edged.

"The Third World War, short and inconclusive as it was, made painfully clear the fact that mass destruction had become ridiculous," he went on. "War was traditionally an instrument of national policy, a means of imposing one's will on another state when less drastic measures had failed. But a threat to instigate mutual suicide has no such meaning. At the same time, force is still the *ultima ratio*. It is no use to preach that killing is wrong, that human life is infinitely valuable, and so on. I'm afraid that in point of blunt, regrettable fact, human life has always been a rather cheap commodity. From a man defending his wife against a homicidal maniac, on to the most complex international questions, issues are bound to arise from time to time which cannot be resolved. If these issues are too important to ignore, men will then fight.

"The problem of the world today is, therefore, not to plan grandiose renunciations of violence. I know that many distinguished people regard our present system of killing—not whole populations, but the leaders of those populations—as a step forward. Certainly it is more efficient, even more humane, than war. But it does not lead logically to a next step of killing no one at all. Rather, it has only shifted the means of enforcing the national will.

"Our task is to understand this process. That will not be easy. Assassination evolved slowly, almost unconsciously, as all viable human institutions do. Like old-fashioned war, it has its own reaction upon the political purposes for which it is used. Also like war, it has its own evolutionary tendencies. Once we thought we had contained war,

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made it a safely limited duel between gentlemen. We learned better. Let us not make the same complacent mistake about our new system of assassination. Let us not—"

"Shine, mister?"

I looked down into a round face and black almond eyes. He was perhaps ten years old, small, quick, and brilliant in the Mandarin tunic affected by most Chinatown youngsters these days. (It's a kind of defiance, an appeal: Look, we're Americans too, with a special and proud heritage; our ancestors left the old country before the Kung She rose up to make humans into machinery.) There was a box under his arm.

"What time machine did you get off of?" I asked him.

"A shoe blaster's no good," he grinned. "I give you a hand shine, just like the Nineties. The Gay Nineties, I mean, not the Nasty Nineties." As I hesitated, "You could ride in my cable car too, only I'm still saving up to have one built. Get your shoes shined and help make San Francisco picturesque again!"

I laughed. "Sure thing, bucko. I may have to take off in a hurry, though, so let me pay you in advance."

He made a sparrow's quick estimate of me. "Five dollars."

The cost of a slug of bourbon didn't seem excessive for a good excuse to loiter here. Besides, I like kids. Once I hoped to have a few of my own. Most people in the Bureau of National Protection (good old Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy!) do: they keep regular hours. However, the field agent—or trigger man, if you don't want euphemisms—has no business getting married. I tried, but shouldn't have. Several years later, when the memory wasn't hurting quite so much, I saw how justified she had been.

I flipped the boy a coin, he speared it in midair, then broke out his apparatus. Morales was still talking in the screen. The boy cocked an eye at it. "What's he talking about, mister? The assassination that's on?"

"The whole system." I switched the program off hastily, not wanting to draw even this much attention to the truth of my purpose.

But the kid was too bright. Smearing wax on my shoes, he said, "Gee. I don't understand it. How long we been fighting those old Chinese, anyhow? Seven months? And nothing's happened. I bet pretty soon they'll call it off and talk some more. It don't make sense! Why didn't they *do* something first?"

"The two countries might agree on an armistice," I said with care. "But that won't have been for lack of trying. A lot of wars in the old days got called off, too, when neither side found it could make any headway. Do you think it's easy to pot the President, or Chairman Kao-Tsung?"

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"I guess not. But Secret Operative Dan Steelman, on the vid—"

"Yeah," I grunted. "Him."

If I'd been one of those granite-jawed microcephalics with beautiful female assistants, whom you see represented as agents of the B.N.P., there would have been no problem. Everything looked so clear-cut. The United States of America and the Great Society of China were in a formally declared state of assassination. Our men were gunning for their leaders, and vice versa.

Specifically, Senator Greenstein was to address an open meeting in San Francisco tonight, rallying a somewhat reluctant public opinion behind the Administration's firm stand on the Cambodia question. He could do it, too: he was not only floor leader of the Senate Enterprisers, but a brilliant speaker and much admired personally, a major engine of our entire foreign policy. At any time the Chinese would be happy to bag him. The Washington branch of my corps had already parried several attempts. Tonight he should be particularly vulnerable.

So Secret Operative Dan Steelman would have arrested the man for whom I stood waiting, the moment he walked into the bar where I'd first spotted him. After a fist fight which tore up the whole saloon, we'd get the secret papers which showed that the Chinese consulate was the local HQ of their organization, we'd raid that place, fadeout to happy ending and long spiel about Jolt, the New Way to Take Lysergic Acid.

Haw. To settle a single one of those clichés, how stupid is an assassination corps supposed to be? A consulate or embassy is the last place to work out of. Quite apart from its being watched as a matter of routine, diplomatic relations are too valuable to risk in such a breach of international law.

Furthermore, I didn't want to give the Chinese the slightest tip-off that we knew The Sword Called Precious Pearl was a rendezvous of theirs. It had taken Johnny Wang months to contact their organization, months more to get sucked into it, a couple of years to work up high enough so that he could pass on an occasional bit of information. If they knew we knew about that bar, they'd simply find another spot.

They might also trace back the leak and find Johnny, whom we could ill afford to lose. He was one of our best. In fact, he'd bagged Semyanov all by himself, during the Russo-American set-to a decade ago. (He passed himself off as a Buryat Mongol, got a bellhop job in the swank new hotel at Khrushchevgrad, and smuggled in his equipment piece by piece; when the Soviet Minister of Production finally visited that Siberian town on one of his inspection trips, Johnny Wang was all set to inject the air conditioning of the official suite with hydrogen cyanide.)

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My sarcasm surprised the boy. "Well, gee, yes," he said. "I hadn't thought much about it. But I guess it *is* tough to get a big government man, so tough I wonder why they even try."

"Oh, there are ways," I said, not elaborating. It can be too unpleasant. Synergic poison, for example. Slip your victim one of the components, harmless in itself, weeks in advance; then, at your leisure, give him the other one, mixed in his food or sprayed as an aerosol in his office.

Though nowadays, with the art of guarding a man twenty-four hours a day so highly developed, the trend is back again toward more colorful brute force. If he is not to become a mere figurehead, an important man has to move around, appear publicly, attend conferences; and that sometimes lays him open to his hunters.

"Like what ways?" the boy persisted.

"Well," I said, "if the quarry makes a speech behind a shield of safety plastic, your assassin might wear an artificial arm with a gun inside it. He might shoot a thermite slug through the plastic and the speaker, then use a minijato pack to get out of the police cordon and over the rooftops."

Actually, such a method is hopelessly outdated now, but it isn't as horrid as some of the things which laboratories are now working on—like remote-control devices to burn out a brain or stop a heart. I went on, quickly, "An assassination is rather like a football game, son. It's a contest, not between individual oafs such as you see on the vid, but between whole organizations. The guy who makes the touchdown used to depend on line backs, blocking, a long pass. The organizations might probe for months at a time before finding a chink in the enemy armor. But if we knock off enough of their leaders, one after the other, eventually there'll be men in power who are scared enough—or otherwise ready to compromise—so that negotiations can recommence to our advantage."

I didn't add that two can play at that game.

As a matter of fact, in a quiet way, we and the Chinese had been nibbling at each other. Their biggest prize so far was the Under-Secretary of State; not being anxious to admit the fact, our corps let the coroner's verdict of accidental death stand, though we had enough evidence to the contrary. Our best trophy was the Commissar of Internal Waterways for Hopeh Province. That doesn't sound like much till you realize what a lot of traffic still goes by water in China and that his replacement, correspondingly powerful, favored conciliating the Americans.

But so far there had been no really big, really decisive coups on either side.

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However, Johnny Wang had learned that four top field agents of the Chinese assassination corps were due in town—at the same time as Senator Greenstein.

More than that he had not discovered. The cell type of organization limits the value of even the most gifted spy. We did not know exactly when, where, or how these agents were to arrive: submarine, stratochute, false bottom of a truck, or what. We did not know their assignments, though the general idea seemed easy enough to guess.

Naturally, our outfit was alerted to protect Greenstein and the other bigwigs who were to meet him. Every inch of his route, before and after the speech, had been preplanned in secret and was guarded one way or another. Since the Chinese presumably expected us to be so careful, we were all the more worried that they should slip in their crack hunters at this exact time. Why waste men on a hopeless task? Or was it hopeless?

Very few men could be spared from guard duty. I was one. They had staked me out in front of The Sword Called Precious Pearl and told me to play by ear.

The shoeshine rag snapped around my feet. The boy's mind had jumped to football itself, which was a relief. I told him I didn't think we'd make the Rose Bowl this year, but he insisted otherwise. It was a lot of fun, arguing with him. I wished I could keep it up.

"Well." He picked up his kit. "How's that, mister? Pretty good, huh? I gotta go now. If I was you, I wouldn't wait any longer for some old girl."

His small form vanished in the crowd as I looked at my watch and realized I'd been waiting here almost an hour. What was going on in that building I'd been watching?

And what exactly did I know?

I listed it in my head for the thousandth time as I stood there. We knew it was a meeting place of the enemy, that only the owner and one bartender were Chinese agents, that the rest of the help were innocent and unaware. Bit by bit we'd studied them all, and the layout of the place. We'd even got one of our own girls in, as a waitress. We knew there was a storeroom upstairs, always kept locked and burglar-alarmed; we hadn't risked forcing a sneak entry, but doubtless it was a combination office, file room, and cache for tools and weapons.

Posted at the dragon-shaped bar, I had seen a little man enter. He was drably ordinary, not to be distinguished from the rest of the Saturday afternoon crowd. His Caucasian face might be real or surgical; the Kung She does have a lot of whites in its pay, just as we have friends of Oriental race. Nothing had differentiated this man except that he spoke quietly for a while with that bartender who was

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a traitor, and then had gone upstairs. I'd faded outside again. The building had no secret passages or any such nonsense. My man could emerge from the front door onto Grant Street, or out a rear door and a blind alley to Jefferson. My eyes covered both possibilities.

But I'd been waiting an hour now.

He might simply be waiting too. However, the whole thing smelled wrong.

I reached my decision and slipped into the grocery store behind me. Its phone booth stood between the bok choy counter and the candied ginger shelf. I dialed local HQ, slipped a scrambler on the mouthpiece, and said to the recorder at the other end what I'd observed and what I planned. There wasn't much the corps could do to help, or even to stop me, nailed down as they were by the necessity of protecting the Senator and his colleagues. But if I never reported back again, it might be useful for them to know what I'd been about.

I pushed through the crowd, hardly conscious of it. Not that I needed to be. I knew them all by heart. The Chinatown citizens, selling their Oriental wares, keeping alive their Cantonese language after a century or more over here. Other San Franciscans, looking for amusement. The tourists from Alaska, Massachusetts, Iowa, cratered Los Angeles. The foreigners—Canadians, self-conscious about belonging to the world's wealthiest nation, leaning over backward to be good fellows; Europeans, gushing over our old buildings and quaint little shops; Russians, bustling earnestly around with cameras and guidebooks; an Israeli milord, immaculate, reserved, veddy veddy Imperial; a South African or Indonesian in search of a white clerk to order around; and a few Chinese proper—consular officials or commercial representatives, stiff in their drab uniforms but retaining a hint of old Confucian politeness.

Possibly, face remodeled, speech and gait and tastes reconditioned, a Chinese assassin, stalking me. But I couldn't stop to worry about that. I had one of my own to hunt.

Crossing the street, I bent my attention to a *koan* I'd found helpful before—"What face did you wear before your mother and father conceived you?"—and re-entered The Sword Called Precious Pearl in a more relaxed and efficient state. I stood by the entrance a moment, letting my pupils adjust to cool smoky dimness.

A waitress passed near. Not ours, unfortunately—Eva didn't come on duty till twenty hundred. But I'd read the dossiers on everyone working here. The girl I saw was a petite blonde. Surgery had slanted her blue eyes, which made for a startling effect; the archaic slit-skirt uniform worn here was also helpful. Our inquiries, Eva's reports,

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everything tagged her as being impulsive, credulous, and rather greedy.

It was taking a chance, but the instinctive sense of desperation was growing on me. I tapped her arm and donned a sort of smile. "Excuse me, miss."

"Yes?" She stopped. "Can I bring you something, sir?"

"A little information is all. I'm trying to track down a friend." I slipped her a two hundred dollar bill. She nodded very brightly, tucked the bill in her belt pouch, and led me into a cavernous rear booth. I seated myself opposite her and closed curtains which I recognized as being of sound-absorbent material.

"Yes, sir?" she invited.

I studied her through the twilight. Muffled, the talk and laughter and footsteps in the bar seemed far away, not quite real. "Don't get excited, sis," I said. "I'm just looking for a guy. You probably saw him. He came in an hour or so ago, talked to Slim at the bar, then went upstairs. A little baldish fellow. Do you remember?"

Her sudden start surprised me. "No," she whispered. "I can't—you'd better—"

I didn't know what this meant, but immediately stepped up my pressure. First, I achieved a chuckle. "He's a bit shy, but I am too. I only want a chance to talk to him privately, without Slim knowing. It's a business deal, see, and I want him to hear my offer. All I'm asking you to do is, tell me if he's still in that storeroom." As her eyes grew round: "Yes, I know that's the only possible place for him to have gone. Nothing else up there but an office and such—all much too public."

"I don't know," she said jaggedly.

"Well, can you find out?" I took out my wallet, extracted ten kilobuck notes, and shuffled them before her. "This is yours for the information, and nobody has to be told. In fact, nobody had better be told. Ever."

Fine beads of sweat glittered on her forehead, catching the wan light in here. She was scared. It wasn't me. I don't look tough, and anyhow she was used to petty gangsters. But she had seen something lately which disconcerted her, and when I showed up and touched on the same nerve, it was a shock.

"You under contract here?" I asked, keeping my voice mild.

Her golden head shook.

"Then I'd quit if I were you," I said. "Today. Go work somewhere else—the other end of town or a different city altogether."

I decided to take a further risk, and pulled my right sleeve up far enough for her to glimpse the gun barrel strapped to my forearm.

"This is not a healthy spot," I went on. "Slim's got himself mixed up with something."

I observed her closely. My next

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line could go flat on its face, it was so straight from the tall corn country. Or it could be a glimpse of hell. She was so rattled by now that I decided she might fall for it.

"Zombie racket," I said.

"Oh, no!" She had shrunk away from me when I showed the gun. At my last words, she sagged against the booth wall, and her oblique blue eyes went blank.

I had her hooked. Finding someone who'd believe that story on so little evidence was my first break today. And I needed it!

Not that the racket doesn't still exist, here and there. And where it does, it's ghastly enough. But mostly it's wiped out. Not even legitimate doctors do much psychosurgery any more, and certainly not for old-time zombie merchants. (I refer to the civilized world; totalitarian governments still find the procedures useful.)

"You needn't tell Slim, or anyone, why you're quitting," I said, placing the bills on the table. "That's jet fare to any other spot in the world, and a stake till you get another job. I understand there are lots of openings around Von Braunsville these days, what with the spaceport being expanded."

She nodded, stiff in the neck muscles.

"Okay, sis," I finished. "Believe me, you needn't get mixed up in this at all. I just want to know whatever you noticed about that little guy."

"I saw him talk to Slim and then go upstairs by himself." She spoke so low I could barely hear. "That was kind of funny—unusual, I mean. A couple of us girls talked about it. Then I saw him come down again maybe fifteen minutes ago. You know, in this business you got to keep watching everywhere all the time, see if the customers are happy and so on."

I nodded—that was the main reason I'd returned here.

"Well, he came down again," she said. "It must have been the man you mean, because nobody else goes up there this time of day. And like you said, he must have gone in the storeroom. They don't ever allow anybody else in it, I guess you know. Well, when he came back, he didn't look like himself. He wore different clothes—red tunic, green pants, and he had thick black hair and walked different, and he carried a little bag or satchel—"

Her voice trailed off. I wondered how a man goes about strangling himself. Of course there would be disguise materials in that room upstairs! Not that a skilled agent needs much; it's fantastic what a simple change of posture will do.

My man had altered his looks, picked up whatever tools he needed, and sauntered out the front door under my eye like any departing customer.

For a moment I debated coldly whether the enemy knew this place

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was known to us. Probably not—they had merely been taking a sensible extra precaution. The fault was ours—no, mine—for underestimating their thoroughness.

I looked hard at the girl. To be sure, I consoled myself, they in turn had underestimated her and her companions. It's a characteristic failing of the present-day Chinese—to forget that the unregimented common man is able to see and think about things he hasn't been conditioned to see and think about. Nonetheless, they were now ahead on points: because I had no idea where my mouse-turned-cat was going.

"What's the matter?" The girl's tones became shrill. "I told you all I know. It scared me some, but I figured it was Slim's business. Then you showed up and—Go on! Get out of here!"

"I don't suppose you observed which way he turned as he went out the door?" I asked.

She shook her head. The rest of her was shaking too.

I sighed. "Makes no difference. Well, thanks, sis. If you don't want to attract attention to yourself, you better take a happy pill before going back to work."

She agreed by fumbling in her pouch. So as not to be noticed either, I remained slumped for another few minutes. By then the girl was in orbit. She looked at me rosily, giggled, and said, "Care to offer me a job yourself? You bought quite a few hours of my time already, you know."

"I bought your plane fare," I told her sharply, and left. Sometimes I think a temporary zombie is as gruesome as a permanent one, and more dangerous to civilization.

I had been racing around in my own skull while I waited, like any trapped rat, getting nowhere. A full-dress attempt on Senator Greenstein—even with the hope of also bagging the Governor, the state chairman of the Enterprise Party, and various other jupiters—didn't seem plausible. The only way I could imagine to get them would be by, say, a light super-fast rocket bomber, descending from the stratosphere with ground guidance. But such weapons were banned by the World Disarmament Convention. If the Chinese were about to break *that* . . . Impossible! What use is it to be the chief corpse in a radioactive desert?

Had the enemy research labs come up with a new technique: the virus gun, the invisibility screen, or any of those dream weapons? Conceivable, but doubtful. One of our own major triumphs had been a raid on their central research lab in Shanghai. We hadn't captured Grandfather Scientist Feng as hoped, but our agents had machine-gunned a number of valuable lesser men and blown up the main building. There was every reason to believe we were ahead of them in armaments development.

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The Chinese had nothing we didn't have more of, except perhaps imagination.

And yet they wouldn't slip four of their best killers into this country merely for a lark. The trigger man of real life bears no resemblance to the one on your living-room screen. He has to have the potentialities to start with, and such genes are rare. Then a lot of expensive talent goes into training him, peeling off ordinary humanness and installing the needful reflexes. I say this quite without modesty, sometimes wishing to hell I'd flunked out. But at any rate, a top-grade field agent is not expended lightly.

So where was my boy?

I slouched down Grant Street, under the dragon lamps and the peaked tile roofs, thinking that I might know where he had gone. If he murdered cleverly enough, as he was trained to do, it would pass for an accident—though naturally, whenever a prominent man died while a state of assassination existed, the presumption was that it had been engineered. The corps couldn't investigate every home electrocution, iodine swallowed by mistake for cough syrup, suicide . . . However, no operative killed obscure folk—there was no reason for it and we aren't sadists; we are the kings who die for the people that little boys with shoeshine kits may not again be fried on molten streets . . .

I don't know what put it into my head. Hunch, subconscious ratiocination, esp, lucky guess—I just don't know. But I have said that a trigger man is a special and lonely creature.

I stood unmoving for an instant. The crowd milled around me, frantic in search of something to fill the rest of the thirty-hour week; I was a million light-years elsewhere and it was cold.

Then I started running.

I slowed down in a moment, which was more efficient under these conditions. I told myself that dsin y equals cos y dy and dcos y equals minus sin y dy. I asked myself how high is green, and presently I arrived in front of New St. Mary's church, where the taxis patrol. Somebody's mother was hailing one. As it drew up I pushed her aside, hopped into the bubble, closed it on her gray hairs, and said, "Berkeley!"

No use urging speed on the pilot. I had to sit there and fume. The knowledge that it followed the guide cables faster and more safely than any human chauffeur was scant consolation. I could have browbeaten a man.

The Bay looked silver, down a swooping length of street. Its far side was a gleam of towers and delicate colors; they rebuilt well over there, but it so happened the bomb left them a clearer field than in San Francisco. The air was bright and swift, and I could see

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the giant whale-shape of a transpolar merchant submarine standing in past Alcatraz Peace Tower. Looking at that white spire, I wondered if the old German idea about a human race mind isn't correct: and if so, how grisly a sense of humor does it have?

But there was business on hand. As we swooped into the Bay tunnel I took the city index off its shelf by the phone and leafed through. The address I wanted . . . yes, there it was . . . "2878 Buena Vista," I told the pilot.

I had no idea if the resident was home; but neither did my opponent, I supposed. I should call ahead, warn . . . No. If my man was actually there, he mustn't be tipped off that I knew.

We came out onto the freeway and hummed along at an even 100 MPH, another drop in a river of machines. The land climbed rapidly on this side, too. We skirted the city within a city which is the U.C. campus, dropped off the freeway at Euclid, and followed that avenue between canyonlike apartment house walls to Buena Vista. There the street was old and narrow and dignified. We had to go slow, while I groaned.

"2878 Buena Vista," my voice played back to me. The change from my money jingled down. I scooped it up.

"Drive on past," I said. "Let me off around the next bend."

I heard a clicking. The pilot didn't quite understand, bucked my taped words on to a human dispatcher across the Bay, got its coded orders, and obeyed.

I walked back, the street on my right and a high hedge on my left. Roofs and walls swept away below me, falling to the glitter of great waters. San Francisco and Marin County lifted their somehow unreal hills on the farther side. A fresh wind touched my face. My footfalls came loudly and the arm gun weighed a million pounds.

At the private driveway I turned and walked in. Landscaped grounds enclosed a pleasant modernistic house: the University did well by its president. An old gardener was puttering with some roses. I began to realize just how thin my hunch was.

He looked up. His face was wizened, his clothes fifty years out of style, even his language quaint. "What's the drag, man?"

"Looking for a chap," I said. "Important message. Any strangers been around here?"

"Well, I dunno. We get a lot of assorted cats."

I flipped a ten-dollar coin up and down in a cold hand. "Medium height, thin," I said, "black hair, smallish nose, red tunic, green slacks, carrying a bag."

"Dunno," repeated the gardener. "I mean, like hard to remember."

"Have a beer on me," I said, my heartbeat picking up. I slipped him the coin.

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"Cat went in about fifteen minutes ago. Said he was on the Sonaclean repair bit."

That was a good gimmick. It's expensive, having your things cleaned with supersonics, but once you've bought the apparatus it's so damned automatic it even diagnoses its own troubles and calls for its own service men. I went up the porch steps fast and leaned on the chimes. A voice from the scanner cooed, "How do you do, sir. Your business, please."

"I'm from Sonaclean," I snapped. "Something appears to be wrong with your set."

"We have a repairman here now sir."

"The continuator doesn't mesh with the hypostat. We got an alarm. You'd better let me talk to him."

"Very good, sir. One moment, please."

I waited for about sixty geological epochs, then the door was opened manually, by the same house maintenance technician who'd quizzed me. I'd know that pigeon voice in hell, where as a matter of fact I was.

"This way, please, sir." She led me down a hall, past a library loaded with books both folio and micro, and opened a panel on a downward stair. "Straight that way."

I looked into fluorescent brightness. Perhaps, I thought in a remote volume of myself, death is not black; perhaps death is just that featureless white luminosity, forever. I went down the stairs.

The brains as well as the guts and sinews of the house were down here. A monitor board blinked many red eyes at me; a dust precipitator buzzed within an air shaft. I looked across the glazed plastic floor and saw my man beside an open Sonaclean. His tools were spread out in front of him, and he stood in a posture that looked like a slump but wasn't. If needful, he could lift his arm and shoot in the same motion that dropped him on the floor or bounced him sideways. And yet his face was kindly, the eyes tired, the skin sagging a bit with surgical middle age.

"Hello," he said. "What brings you here?"

He wasn't expecting a man from the company, of course. He'd disconnected the Sonaclean the moment he'd arrived. I didn't believe he was going to plant a bomb, or any such elaborate deal. He'd fiddle around down here a while, put the machine back together, go upstairs. Perhaps this was merely a reconnoitering expedition, or perhaps he knew where Morales was and would slay him this same day. Yes, probably the latter.

He'd slip to Juan Morales's study, kill with a single karate blow, arrange a rug or stool to make the death look accidental, come back to the head of this stairway, then take his leave. Quite likely no one would ever check

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with the Sonaclean outfit. Even if someone did, my man would have vanished long ago; and he was unmemorable. Here, now, a few yards from him, realizing there must be a gun beneath his tunic sleeve, I found it hard to fix him in my mind. That anonymous drabness was the work of a great artist.

Was he, even, the one I sought? His costume combination was being worn this instant by a million innocent citizens; his face was anyone's; maybe, I thought, the sole deadliness here was housed in my own sick brain.

I grunted. "Air filter inspection."

He turned back to his dojiggling with the machine. I knew then that he was my man.

It took him seconds to comprehend what I had said. An American would have protested at once, "Hey, this is Saturday—" As he whipped about on his heel my right arm came up.

Our guns hissed together, but mine was aimed. He lurched back from sheer impact. The needle stood full in his neck. For a moment he sagged against the wall, then blindness seized his eyes. I crouched, waiting for him to lose consciousness.

Instead, his lips peeled from his teeth, his spine arched, and he left the wall in a stiff rigadoon. While he screamed I cursed and ran up the stairs, three at a time.

The housie came into the library from the opposite side. "What's the matter?" she cried. "Wait! Wait, you can't—"

I was already at the phone. I fended her off with an elbow while I dialed local HQ, emergency extension. That's one line which is always open, with live monitors, during a state of assassination. I rattled off my identification number and then: "I'm at 2878 Buena Vista, Berkeley. Get a revival squad here. Regular police, if our own isn't handy. I plugged one of the opposition with an anesthetic needle, but they seem to have found some way of sensitizing. He went straight into tetany . . . 2878 Buena Vista, yes. Snap it up, and we may still get some use out of him!"

The woman wailed behind me as I pounded back down the stairs. My man was dead, hideously rigid on the floor. I picked him up. A corpse isn't really heavier than an organic human, but it feels that way.

"The deep freeze!" I roared. "Where in hell is your freezer? If we can keep the process from— don't stand there and gawp! Every second at room temperature, more of his brain cells are disintegrating! Do you want them to revive an idiot?"

If he could be resurrected at all. I wasn't sure what had been done to his biochemistry, to make him react this way to plain old neurocaine. For his sake I could almost hope he wouldn't be viable. I could have done worse in life than be a

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trigger man, I guess: might have ended up on an interrogation team. Not that prisoners undergo torture, nothing that crude, but—oh, well.

The housie squealed, nearly fainted, but finally led me to a cabinet behind the kitchen. Then she ran out again. I dumped out several hundred dollars' worth of food to make room for my burden.

As I closed the lid Dr. Juan Morales showed up. He was quite pale, but he asked me steadily, "What happened to that man?"

"I think he had a heart attack." I mopped my face and sat down on the cold cabinet; my knees were rubber.

Morales stood a moment, regarding me. Some of his color returned, but there was also a bleakness gathering on him. "Miss Thomas said something about your using a needle gun," he told me, very low.

"Miss Thomas babbles," I replied.

I saw his fists clench till the knuckles stood white. "I have a family to think of," he said after a while. "Doesn't that give me a right to know the truth?"

I sighed. "I guess so. Come on, let's talk privately. Afterward you can persuade Miss Thomas she misheard me on the phone. Best to keep this off the newscasts, you realize."

He led me to his study, seated me, and poured some welcomed brandy. Having refilled the glasses and offered cigars, he sat down too. The room was comfortable and masculine, lined with books, a window opening on the bayview grandeur. We smoked in a brief and somehow friendly silence.

At last he said, "I take it you're from the Bureau of National Protection."

I nodded. "Been chasing that fellow. He gave me the slip. I didn't know where he was bound, but I got a hunch that turned out to be correct."

"But why me?" he breathed—the question which every man must ask himself, at least once in this life.

I chose to interpret it literally. "They weren't after Senator Greenstein or the other big politicos at all," I said. "They simply picked this time to strike because they knew most of our manpower would be occupied, giving them a clear field everywhere else. I was wrestling with the problem of what they actually planned to do, and a bit from your lecture came back to me."

"My lecture?" His laugh was nervous, but it meant much that he could laugh at all. "Which one?"

"It was on the vid earlier today. About the evolution of war. You were remarking on how it started as a way to break the enemy's will, and ended up trying to destroy the enemy himself—not only armies, but factories, fields, cities, women, children. You were wondering, out

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loud if assassination might not develop along similar lines. Evidently it has."

"But me . . . I am no one! A college president, a minor local figure in a party that lost the last election—"

"It's still a major party," I said. "Its turn will come again one of these years. You're among its best thinkers, and still quite young as politicians go. Wilson and Eisenhower were once university presidents too."

I saw a horror in his eyes, and it was less for himself, who must now live under guard and fear, than it was for all of us. But that, I suppose, is one of the reasons he was a target.

"Sure," I said, "they're gunning for the present President, for Senator Greenstein, for the other Americans who stand in their way in this crisis. Maybe they'll succeed, maybe they won't. In either case, it won't be the last such conflict. They're looking ahead—twenty years, thirty years. As long as there's a state of assassination anyway, they figure they might as well weaken us for the future by killing off our most promising leaders."

I heard a siren. It must be the revival squad. I stood up. "You might try to anticipate the others they'll hunt," I told him. "There are three other operatives still loose that I know of, and we may not extract enough information from the one I got."

He shook his head in a blind, dazed way. "I'm thinking of more than that," he said. "It's like being one of the old atomic scientists on Hiroshima Day. Suddenly an academic proposition has become real."

I paused at the door. He went on, not looking at me, talking only to his nightmare:

"It's more than the coming necessity of guarding every man who could possibly interest them—though God knows that will be burdensome enough, and when we have to start guarding every gifted child . . . It's more, even, than our own retaliation in kind; more than the targets spreading, from potential leaders to potential scientists to potential teachers and artists and I dare not guess what. It's that the bounds have been broken.

"I see the rules laid aside once more, in the future. Sneak-attack assassinations. Undeclared assassinations. Assassination with massive weapons that take a thousand innocent bystanders. Permanent states of assassination, dragging on for decade after decade, and no reason for them except the gnawing down of the others because they are the others.

"Whole populations mobilized against the hidden enemy, with every man watching his neighbor like a shark, with privacy, decency, freedom gone. Where is it going to end?" he asked the sky and the broad waters. "Where is it going to end?"

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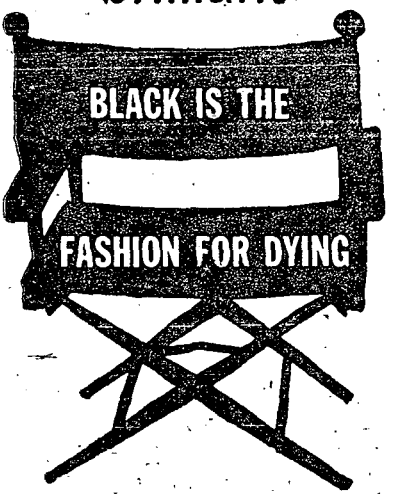

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **EDGAR PANGBORN**

TITLE: ***The Naked Man in the Elephant House***

TYPE: Policeman's Lot—with comic relief

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: August 17-18, 1959

COMMENTS: *An official report by I. J. Nussbaum, policeman on duty in Central Park, of the strange case of a traveling salesman dressed only in a pair of shell-rim glasses and a pair of bedroom slippers . . . so help us!*

AT 5:18 A.M., TUESDAY, AUGUST 18, 1959, while patrolling that section of Central Park which includes the zoological exhibit, and being then in the area between the south animal building and the pool containing sea lions, I received a call for assistance from Elihu Jackson, who is employed by the city as a night attendant at the said Zoo.

Mr. Jackson ran out of the building which houses the elephant, hippopotamuses, and some other fauna, and addressed me as follows: "Hey, officer! There's a maniac in with the bull, and he's naked as a snake."

Being aware that in circus and related parlance the term "bull" is frequently used to refer to an elephant, whether of the male or the female sex, I proceeded immediately to the elephant house, and observed within the enclosure, a moderately large male of the Asiatic species, what appeared to be a human individual approximately 45 years of age, height 5′ 2″, weight about 180 pounds. Subject individual was seated in, and partly covered by, a pile of hay in a corner of the enclosure. Mr. Jackson at this time provided the information that he had heard the elephant mumbling in a way that meant he (the elephant) didn't feel good.

When I entered the building the elephant was located partly inside the enclosure and partly outside in the yard. The head, or front, section of the animal was the section within the enclosure, and he (the animal) was shaking it.

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I inquired of subject individual on the hay what he was doing in there. He replied: "Nothing." He added, if I correctly understood him, that it was anyway better than the hippopotamus. I then directed Mr. Jackson to open the service door and let the man out. Mr. Jackson replied: "He's mean, that bull is."

Considering Mr. Jackson's reply not only unresponsive but lacking in humanity, I pointed out that the door opening on the runway between the enclosure and the central aisle of the building was too small to admit the passage of an elephant and could therefore be opened with impunity.

Mr. Jackson replied (verbatim): "Not on your fanny—soon as I do he'll charge on account he don't feel good. When they shake their head thataway, means he don't feel good."

I immediately directed Mr. Jackson to give me the key to the padlock on the service door and then go outside the building and create a diversion.

He said: "Do what?"

I said: "Make a noise."

He said: "Oh."

After some further conversation omitted here as not relevant, Mr. Jackson gave the key to me, went outside the building, and made a noise, which as I had hoped induced the animal to retire. In retiring from the enclosure, however, the animal did not back out, but first came all the way in, made a circle of the area, and on his way out, while passing subject individual seated on and within the hay, tapped subject individual's shoulder with his trunk.

Beyond smiling in a manner suggestive of nervousness, subject individual made no response. The animal then, as before indicated, reversed his position in the doorway: that is to say, the head, or front, section was placed outside the building, presumably with reference to the diversion created by Mr. Jackson.

I then lowered myself into the runway, opened the service door, and requested subject individual to come out through that. He did so, at which time I observed that he was wearing, in addition to a pair of shell-rim glasses, a pair of bedroom slippers of the color which I understand is known as baby-blue.

Interrogation, by Nussbaum, I. J., Shield No 28E31416:

Q: Your name, please?

A: Hector Ponsonby.

Q: Middle initial?

A: M. For McWhirter.

Q: Age?

A: Forty-six.

Q: Residence?

A: Worcester, Massachusetts.

Q: And your occupation?

A: I travel in woolen underwear.

Q: But you are not at the moment doing so?

A: No.

Mr. Ponsonby then explained,

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with a command of language which was excellent and coherent, but somewhat too detailed and voluminous for inclusion in this report, that he had intended, by his last answer, to convey the information that he was by occupation a salesman for the firm of Brigham & Bottomley, textile manufacturers of Worcester, Massachusetts, and was in New York in pursuance of his normal commercial activities when the wind blew the door shut. The interrogation continued as follows:

Q: Would you be willing to explain what occasioned your presence in the elephant's hay with no clothes on?

A: Gladly, if someone will lend me a pair of pants. And by the way, is the dog gone?

Interpolation, by Elihu Jackson, who had by then returned: We don't allow no dogs in the Zoo.

Ponsonby: Damn it, you allowed that one.

Second interpolation: There ain't no dogs allowed in this here Zoo.

Interrogation continued, by Nussbaum: Do you feel all right?

A: I feel better.

I then directed Mr. Jackson to procure from his locker or from general supply whatever might be available in the way of temporary clothing adaptable to a man of Mr. H. McW. Ponsonby's height and weight. I further instructed Mr. Jackson that if while thus engaged he should encounter other persons (which I considered unlikely in view of the earliness of the hour) he should make no mention of the incident in the elephant-house, out of respect for Mr. Ponsonby's status not only as a citizen but as an out-of-town visitor.

I also made it clear to Mr. Jackson (wherein perhaps I exceeded my authority) that if any damage to the clothing or inconvenience to himself resulted from his action, adequate compensation would probably be allowed by the city, in consideration of his service to the public peace.

While Mr. Jackson was absent, I received from Mr. Ponsonby a preliminary account (later verified in every important particular by such investigation as I felt called upon to make) which I enter here, the same being somewhat simplified from Mr. Ponsonby's original and to some extent overemotional terms. I would emphasize that this account is not offered in lieu of a formal statement by Hector McW. Ponsonby, the said Ponsonby having stated that he will hold himself available to provide such statement if higher authority so directs.

At approximately 10:55 P.M., August 17, 1959, Hector McW. Ponsonby, being then in occupancy of a suite at the Watkins Hotel, 96A East 68th Street, this city, was in the act of taking a bath. Hearing a knock at the door, he put on the pair of blue slippers previously mentioned in this report, and a

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bathrobe which he states was of a color matching the slippers, the two items having been purchased together by his wife, Isabel Stuart Ponsonby, of Worcester, Massachusetts, on the occasion of their twentieth wedding anniversary.

He then opened the door of his suite and was requested to sign for and receive a small parcel, by an individual whom I have not been able to trace but who was probably a legitimate employee of one of the metropolitan messenger services. Supposing the parcel had been sent by his wife, Mr. Ponsonby did sign for and take possession of same.

Q: You were expecting such a parcel?

A: Not exactly, but she often has to.

Q: Would you enlarge on that?

A: Every damn time I go to New York I *always* forget something.

Shortly after the messenger had departed, Mr. Ponsonby, who suffers from myopia, mild and uncomplicated, and who had neglected to put on his glasses before opening the door, discovered that the parcel was addressed, not to him, but to a certain Mr. Hercule M. Ponsovic, who (as I ascertained in subsequent investigation) was registered at the same hotel, and still is, being a professional tea-taster of retiring habits.

Immediately upon discovering the error, Mr. Ponsonby called after the messenger and ran a short distance down the corridor, around the corner of which the said messenger had by that time disappeared. Having advanced in this direction some twenty feet, Mr. Ponsonby distinctly heard the closing of two doors: (1) the door of the elevator; (2) the door of his own suite.

Having verified the closing of his own door—undoubtedly by the wind, then blowing vigorously in advance of a summer thundershower—Mr. Ponsonby attempted to open it with the only tool in the pocket of his bathrobe—namely, a small comb. This (unsuccessful) exercise is, I suggest, clear evidence of a lack of any criminal background.

Two persons had come up in the elevator that took away the messenger and were now advancing down the corridor on Mr. Ponsonby, who at that moment had broken the comb and had thereupon voiced certain expressions verging on the vernacular, which he regrets. He feels they may have been a contributory factor in causing the lady to scream.

These persons (I later ascertained) were Colonel Eustace Bangs, a British visitor late of Her Majesty's Fusilier Guards (it sounded like that), aged 61, and his wife Cordelia, aged 60. Mr. Ponsonby's reconstruction of the ensuing conversation is at least in part corroborated by my later interrogation of Colonel Bangs. It appears to have gone approximately as follows:

Mrs. Bangs: Eustace, do something!

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Colonel Bangs: Well, here now, what's all this, old man? Family hotel, you know, can't run around half naked in a family hotel, you know.

Ponsonby: I got locked out.

Mrs. Bangs: Eustace, the man is a sex maniac. Probably has some helpless child in there.

Colonel Bangs: Well now, my dear, mustn't go off half-cocked, you know, might be some explanation, what?

Mrs. Bangs: You have only to read one of these dreadful American newspapers. And look at his eye.

Ponsonby: Damn it, lady, there's nothing wrong with my eye!

Colonel Bangs: Now now, my wife's present, you know, can't have cursing and swearing, you know. Now, you—

Mrs. Bangs: Be careful, Eustace! He may be armed.

Mr. Ponsonby, believing himself in imminent danger of physical contact with a Colonel six feet two inches high, then flung the small parcel, which he had retained throughout his efforts to open the door, in such a manner as to have it impinge on the frontal bone of Colonel Bangs.

This precipitate action caused no damage whatever to Colonel Bangs, but considerable damage to the parcel, which burst and scattered an indeterminate amount of a dry, black substance all over Colonel and Mrs. Bangs. I have since determined that the substance was Ceylon tea of a rare type and a very high quality which had been sent to Mr. Hercule M. Ponsovric by a friend, as a token of personal esteem. Mr. Ponsonby did not do this, he states, for the purpose of proving there was nothing wrong with his eye; he did it, he maintains, because he had to.

From the interrogation of Colonel Eustace Bangs, conducted August 19, 1959:

Q., by Nussbaum: You were aware, Colonel, at the moment of impact, that you had suffered no lasting physical disability of a traumatic nature?

A: Well, yes, you know, dash it, you know, but you can't have people throwing tea all over people.

Mr. Ponsonby then ran, discovering too late that the direction in which he ran was a dead end. Turning, he observed Colonel Bangs advancing on him with both arms out, like (he says) a mine sweeper.

(A minor discrepancy in Mr. Ponsonby's account should be noted here, but I do not regard it as a reflection on his credibility. For completeness, however: inquiry at the British consulate has established that Colonel Bangs has at no time had any connection whatsoever with Her Majesty's Navy.)

Compelled to run in the other direction, Mr. Ponsonby ducked to leeward of the starboard arm, which, as he passed, secured a grip

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on the blue bathrobe and completely removed it, owing partly to the fact that he (Mr. Ponsonby) shot out of the thing (his expression) like a squeezed appleseed. Mr. Ponsonby then proceeded down the corridor. He asserts he has no recollection of observing a door marked SERVICE STAIRS. He merely passed through it.

At this point in my interrogation of Mr. Ponsonby I noted that the elephant had returned indoors, and instead of shaking his head was now nodding it. I inquired of Mr. Ponsonby whether in his opinion this indicated that he (the animal) was feeling good. Mr. Ponsonby said he did not know. I inquired also concerning the approximate weight of the parcel he had thrown at the Colonel. Mr. Ponsonby estimated it at six ounces.

I then briefly discussed with Mr. Ponsonby the experience which the metropolitan police have had with the phenomenon of recidivism in the criminal element, and against this background I inquired whether he, Mr. Ponsonby, felt that he would be at all likely, should the circumstances recur, to again throw anything like a six-ounce parcel at a retired British Colonel. With every evidence of the utmost sincerity, Mr. Ponsonby replied, no, he would not, not if he saw him first. I then requested him to continue his account.

Mr. Ponsonby considers that his speed in the descent of the service stairs was between seven and seven and a half miles per hour at the moment when he collided with the slowly moving and lighter bulk of a waiter employed by the Watkins Hotel, whom I have identified as Mr. Stanley Moszczenski, age 53. Since the service elevator was in use, Mr. Moszczenski had chosen to use the stairs in order to convey to Mr. Salvatore Rizzo, on the second floor, a room-service tray containing spaghetti Milanese, Parmesan cheese, hot pepper, and the like. From my later investigation:

Q., by Nussbaum: Mr. Rizzo, do you confirm the statement by Mr. Moszczenski, so far as you understand it?

A: I don't speak Polish.

Q: But you comprehend the general drift?

A: All I know, I never get the spaghett'. Was midnight supper, very hungry. I never get.

Mr. Ponsonby was naturally unaware of Mr. Rizzo's position in the matter, during the period he remained seated with Mr. Moszczenski at the foot of the service stairs. He does not recollect saying anything to Mr. Moszczenski except: "For God's sake give me your pants!"

The response of Mr. Moszczenski, being in Polish, is not a matter of record, but Mr. Ponsonby believed at the time that Mr. Moszczenski had, as he phrases it, blood in his eye.

As a result of subsequent inquiry

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I have been able to set Mr. Ponsonby's mind partly at rest on this question. It was not blood but tomato sauce. Nevertheless, Mr. Ponsonby felt himself somewhat to blame, and since two new doorways were now available, he chose the one nearer to him.

At his impact it opened on a stairway leading to the furnace room, where he noted a number of dark spaces, the most inviting being a large coal bin. Mr. Ponsonby gave me to understand that he did not burrow under the coal, since it was summer and the bin was nearly empty. He entered it, he states, simply because it was enclosed on four sides and appeared to offer him a chance to consider his delicate situation. He was, in fact, doing precisely that when a voice over his head remarked: "Hey, you!"

Mr. Ponsonby then observed, hung over the coal bin, a face with pendent gray mustaches. He describes the face as "bilious," which I attribute to Mr. Ponsonby's troubled state of mind, since this is neither a just nor a tolerant description of Mr. Clyde Somerville, boiler-man, unmarried, age 65. Mr. Ponsonby reconstructs their conversation as follows:

"What you doing down there?"

"I am not doing anything."

"Then what's the idear?"

"The wind blew the door shut."

"What door?"

"My door."

"Why'n't you open it?"

"Comb wouldn't fit."

"What comb?"

"The one I blasted, God bust it!"

"You don't want to talk like that if you're going to go messing around in people's coal bins without no clothes on."

"May I borrow your pants?"

"Matter with your own?"

"I told you, I left them behind."

"No, you didn't."

"You can see I did, can't you?"

"Mean you didn't tell me. Had, wouldn't of asked. Why?"

"Why what?"

"Whyja leave 'em behind and go messing around in people's coal bins?"

"The wind blew the door shut."

"All right, don't get excited. You want some pants I'll get you some pants. All's I want to know is why you got to go messing around in people's coal bins without no clothes on."

Mr. Ponsonby then heard the clamor of a search party coming down the stairs, and he said: "Please!"

"Huh?"

"Please, if I could have the pants now and explain later?"

"Explain what?"

"Why the wind blew the door shut."

"Account it's blowing up a storm outside is why."

The search party, according to Mr. Ponsonby's recollection, numbered between eighteen and twenty-four persons, all talking simultane-

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ously. It included Mr. Moszczenski, roughly three bellboys, a house detective with a gun, and Colonel Eustace Bangs. Mr. Ponsonby asserts that when he emerged from the coal bin fearing immediate encirclement, one bellboy remarked: "Gawd, I do mean pink!"

(My investigation has established beyond a shadow of doubt that Mr. Ponsonby is not and never has been a member of the Communist Party.)

At this phase in my interrogation Mr. Elihu Jackson returned to the elephant house with a park attendant's uniform which he said was the best he could do. Mr. Ponsonby, apparently under stress of strong emotion, then made some rather incoherent statement to the effect that until now he had never really loved policemen, and while he was putting on the garments the elephant went outside.

Mr. Ponsonby resumed his account, explaining that the greater part of his attention had been directed toward the house detective with the gun, which Mr. Ponsonby thought to be of .45 caliber. Mr. Jackson interjected the information that if you could believe all you read in them Westerns a .45 can really kill you deader than a dormouse (Mr. Jackson's expression). Mr. Ponsonby concurred. Nevertheless, it appears that he faced the entire group, including the house detective, long enough to remark either: "Why don't you all drop dead?" or "I wish you would all drop dead."

Although Mr. Ponsonby is inclined to think the second version is correct, the first seems to me more likely, because the second is a mere static expression of a wish, while the first embodies the dynamics of a forward-looking proposition appropriate to a man who, through force of circumstances, had become a man of action. It is a difficult point in semantics and perhaps should not be given undue weight.

Then, as a man of action, Mr. Ponsonby ran for an iron grille door at the far end of the furnace room and closed it behind him in such a manner as to cause an abrasion to the nose of Mr. Clement Gahagan, house detective, age 42.

In the statement (attached) which Mr. Gahagan later gave me, he makes it clear that to him the most serious aspect of the episode was the fact that his gun—a .32, not a .45—went off, owing, he feels, to the unforeseen abrasion and not to any absence of control on his part. In informal conversation Mr. Gahagan told me—in good faith, I am sure—that he wouldn't be after shooting the little guy and him naked as a bug.

The bullet, it appears, struck the iron grille, ricocheted, passed through the left branch of Mr. Clyde Somerville's mustache, and lodged in a coal bin from which it was later extracted by Jacques LaFourche, age 13, son of the head

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chef of the Watkins Hotel. My interrogation of Master LaFourche was in part as follows:

Q., by Nussbaum: So you dug her out, Jackie?

A: Well, sure. Can I keep it, Mister? It didn't hit nobody. Can I keep it, huh, can I?

Q: Well, sure.

Since the grille door gave on the outdoors, Mr. Ponsonby went there. The short stairway from the grille led to a side alley closed at one end —the inner end. The open end faced 68th Street. Mr. Ponsonby is quite clear that at the instant of his emergence from the furnace room, the wind was rising strongly but the rain had not begun to fall. It did fall, however, almost immediately after he heard the grille door reopened and recognized the voice of Colonel Eustace Bangs.

Having checked with the Weather Bureau with reference to the time of commencement of the thundershower of August 17, 1959, I am able to pinpoint the time as 11:21, when Mr. Ponsonby came out on 68th Street and shot toward Central Park like (he says) a homing dove.

I have experienced some difficulty in securing reliable witnesses for the time between Mr. Ponsonby's emergence on 68th Street and his disappearance in the park. The rain was then falling heavily, the entire incident was characterized by extremely rapid motion and observation under those conditions must be somewhat discounted.

It seems to be established, however, that in the course of his passage to the park Mr. Ponsonby knocked over one liberal journalist, one Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, and one plumber. The journalist refers to a pink blur, the Justice declined to testify, and the plumber is doubtful, since there is a possibility that he was flattened not by Mr. Ponsonby but by the twelve or fourteen persons who, in spite of the rain, were then engaged in hot pursuit.

Mr. Ponsonby himself is convinced that at least some policemen were included in that section of the electorate which followed him as he moved rapidly westward. I am doubtful of this; the matter could probably be illuminated by reference to higher authority, but I have not done so. I did, however, make it clear to Mr. Ponsonby that the members of the metropolitan police force are not, as he suggested, selected for matched voices, so that when seven or eight of them yell, "Hey, you!" at the same time, the result is not harmony in the musical sense.

I was able to secure one quite reliable witness to Mr. Ponsonby's crossing of Fifth Avenue, namely a taxi driver, Wilkins Krumbhaar, whose vehicle had suffered damage to the right headlight when the same came in contact with a mailbox, because Mr. Krumbhaar was obliged to swerve off the Avenue to avoid collision with an unidentified

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flying object. It was impossible to trace his two passengers, but Mr. Krumbhaar distinctly recalls a conversation that took place between them shortly after the abrasion of his right headlight:

"Baby, did you see what I thought I saw?"

"I think so, but if the cabbie saw what you thought I think you saw you could ask him."

"Driver, did you see what she thinks I thought I saw?"

"Listen, brother. If I hadn't of saw what you wanted to know if I saw what you thought she saw, would I of already clumb the curb?"

Mr. Ponsonby remembers leaping over a couple on the grass without attracting their attention, but apart from that his recollection of his passage into the park is not overprecise. He recalls tearing through a tunnel, and up a hill and down a hill, and into a thicket where he crouched, he thinks, about ten minutes, while a distant baying died away in the south. He felt, however, no deep security.

He was then pursued by a Peke.

I have been unable to locate this animal, or to identify it except as to breed. Mr. Ponsonby is quite clear that it was a Pekinese, of uncertain age, trailing a leash, having presumably lost contact with its owner and strayed. Mr. Ponsonby thinks, but is not certain, that it was a female.

At any rate, upon sighting Mr. Ponsonby in the thicket the animal displayed no hesitation, but charged him at once, obliging him to run, he estimates, rather more than a quarter of a mile. The rain having not yet ceased, Mr. Ponsonby was uncertain of his direction, but it was firmly fixed in his mind, whether correctly or not, that the animal intended to rob him of his slippers.

It is to Mr. Ponsonby's credit, not only as a man of action but as a citizen with a highly developed sense of the decencies, that he retained these slippers, and still had them when he was engaged in climbing some vertical iron bars which, he felt at the time, were unusually high. Having reached the top of them, and observing an elephant on the other side, Mr. Ponsonby felt he could go no further.

It must be emphasized that the entry of this Pekinese into the zoo area was not, in any degree whatsoever, the fault of Elihu Jackson, the night attendant referred to earlier. It is my considered opinion that if the owner of a Pekinese is so neglectful as to lose such an animal and allow it to roam at large, the exclusion of it from an unfenced area such as the one under discussion would require the constant activity of so much additional personnel that the city government could not justifiably recommend it in the budget.

The elephant then proceeded to lift Mr. Ponsonby with his trunk and set him gently down within

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the enclosure. Mr. Ponsonby recalls saying: "Nice elephant."

Mr. Ponsonby then walked without undue haste into the indoor section of the elephant's domain, hoping to find some way out of it and into a sanctuary where he might eventually encounter some member of his own species who would not say, "Hey, you!"

Since the service door was padlocked and Mr. Ponsonby was unable to squeeze through the bars, he finally sat down on the hay. The elephant, he says, came inside from time to time, apparently to reassure himself that Mr. Ponsonby was making out all right.

Having completed his account to me, Mr. Ponsonby was still much troubled with regard to possible charges that might be placed against him, particularly the charge of indecent exposure. So far as my limited authority allowed, I attempted to assure him that any such charge, if raised at all, could probably be dismissed by reference to the commonly accepted legal principle that the law does not concern itself with trifles, or, as I should prefer to state it to my superiors, *De minimis non curat lex*.

(Signed)
Irving J. Nussbaum
Shield No. 28E31416

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Uncle Abner said, "I cannot think of God depending on a thing so crude as reason . . . reason is a quality exclusively peculiar to the human mind. It is a thing that God could never require." Thus, Uncle Abner becomes the instrument of justice, the right hand of the Lord . . .

THE STRAW MAN

by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

IT WAS A DAY OF EARLY JUNE IN Virginia. The afternoon sun lay warm on the courthouse with its great plaster pillars; on the tavern with its two-story porch; on the stretches of green fields beyond and the low wooded hill, rimmed by the far-off mountains like a wall of the world.

It was the first day of the circuit court, which all the country attended. And on this afternoon two men crossed the one thoroughfare that lay through the county seat and went up the wide stone steps into the courthouse.

The two men were in striking contrast. One, short of stature and beginning to take on the rotundity of age, was dressed with elaborate care, his great black stock propping up his chin, his linen and the cloth of his coat immaculate. He wore a huge carved ring and a bunch of seals attached to his watch fob. The other was a big, broad-shouldered, deep-chested Saxon, with all those marked characteristics of a race living out of doors and hardened by wind and sun. His powerful frame carried no ounce of surplus weight. It was the frame of the empire builder on the frontier of the empire. The face reminded one of Cromwell: the craggy features in repose seemed molded over iron, but the fine gray eyes had a calm serenity, like remote spaces in the summer sky. The man's clothes were plain and somber. And he gave one the impression of things big and vast.

As the two entered between the plaster pillars, a tall old man came out from the county clerk's office. But for his face, he might have been one of a thousand Englishmen in Virginia. There was nothing in the big spare figure or the cranial lines of the man to mark.

But the face seized you. In it was an unfathomable disgust with life, joined, one would say, with a cruel courage. The hard, bony jaw protruded; bitter lines descended along the planes of the face, and the eyes circled by red rims were expressionless and staring, as

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though, by some abominable negligence of nature they were lidless.

The two approached, and the one so elaborately dressed spoke to the old man.

"How do you do, Northcote Moore?" he said. "You know Abner?"

The old man stopped instantly and stood very still. He moved the stick in his hand a trifle before him. Then he spoke in a high-pitched, irascible voice.

"Abner, eh! Well, what the devil is Abner here for?"

The little pompous man clenched his fingers in his yellow gloves, but his voice showed no annoyance.

"I asked him to have a look at Eastwood Court."

"Damn the justice of the peace of every county," cried the old man, "and you included, Randolph! You never make an end of anything."

He gave no attention to Abner, who remained unembarrassed, regarding the impolite old man as one regards some strange, new, and particularly offensive beast.

"Chuck the whole business, Randolph, that's what I say," the irascible old man continued, "and forget about it. Who the devil cares? A drooling old paralytic is snuffed out. Well, he ought to have gone five and twenty years ago! He couldn't manage his estate and he kept me out. I was like to hang about until I rotted, while the creature played at Patience, propped up against the table and the wall. Someone, on a search for shillings, knocks him on the head. Shall I hunt the murderer down and hang him? Damme! I would rather get him a patent of state lands!"

The face of Randolph was a study in expression.

"But, sir," he said, "there are some things about this affair that are peculiar—I may say extraordinarily peculiar."

Again the old man stood still. When he spoke his voice was in a lower note.

"And so," he said, "you have nosed out a new clue and got Abner over, and we are to have another inquisition."

He reflected moving his stick idly before him. Then he went on in a petulant, persuasive tone.

"Why can't you let sleeping dogs lie? The country is beginning to forget this affair, and you set about to stir it up. Shall I always have the thing clanking at my heels like a ball and chain?"

Then he rang the paved court with the ferrule of his stick.

"Damme, man!" he cried. "Has Virginia no mysteries that you yap forever on old scents at Eastwood? What does it matter who did this thing? It was a public service. Virginia needs a few men on her lands with a bit of courage. This state is rotten with old timber. In youth, Duncan Moore was a fool. In age, he was better dead. Let there be an end to this, Randolph."

And he turned about and went

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back into the county clerk's office.

Randolph was a justice of the peace in Virginia. He looked a moment after the departing figure; then he spoke to his companion.

"He is here to have the lands of Duncan Moore transferred on the assessor's book to his own name. He takes the estate under the Life and Lives statute of Virginia, that the legislature got up to soften the rigor of Mr. Jefferson's Statute of Descents. Under it, this estate with its great English manor house was devised by the original ancestor to Duncan Moore for his life, and after him to Northcote Moore for his life, and at his death to Mr. Esdale Moore. It could have run twenty-one years farther if the scrivener had known the statute. Mr. Jefferson did not entirely decapitate the law of entail."

He paused and lifted his finger with a curious gesture.

"It is a queer family—I think the very queerest in Virginia. There is something defective about every one of them. Duncan Moore, the decedent, had no children. His two brothers died epileptics. This man, the son of the elder brother is blind. And the son of the junior, Mr. Esdale Moore, the attorney-at-law—"

The Justice of the Peace was interrupted. A little dapper man, sunburned and bareheaded, dressed like a tailor's print, but with the smart, aggressive air of a well-bred colonial Englishman, pushed through the crowd and clapped the Justice on the shoulder.

"What luck, Randolph?" he cried. "I am sure Abner has run the assassin to cover." And he bobbed his head to Abner like one whose profession permits a certain familiarity. "Come along to the tavern—'I would listen to your wondrous tales,' as Homer says it."

He led the way, calling out to a member of the bar, hailing an acquaintance, and hurling banter about him in the bluff, hearty fashion which he imagined to be the correct manner of a man of the people who is getting on. He was in the strength and vigor of his race at forty.

"Beastly dull, Randolph," he rattled. "Nothing exciting since the dawn except old Baron-Vitch's endless suit in chancery. But one must sit tight, rain or shine. The people must know where to find a lawyer when they want him."

He swung along with a big military stride.

"The life of a lawyer is far from jolly. I should like to cut it, Randolph, if I had a good shooting and bit of trout water. Alas, I am poor!" And he made a dramatic gesture.

One felt that under this froth the man was calling out the truth. For all his hearty interest in affairs, the law was merely a sort of game. It was nothing real. He played to win, and he had chosen his profession with care and after long reflection, as a breeder chooses a colt for the

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Derby, or as an English family of influence selects a crack regiment for the heir at Oxford. He cared not one penny what the laws were or the great policies of Virginia, but he did care, with an inbred and abiding interest, about the value of a partridge shooting, or the damming of a trout stream by the grist mills. These things were the realities of life, and not the actions at law or the suits in chancery.

"How does one get a fortune nowadays, Abner?" he called back across his shoulder, "for I need one like the devil. Marriage or crime, eh? Crime requires a certain courage, and they say out in the open that lawyers are decadent. With you and Randolph on the lookout I should be afraid to go in for crime!"

He clapped a passing giant on the back, called him Harrison, accused him of having an eye on Congress, and went on across his shoulder to Abner.

"Marriage, then? Do you know a convenient orphan with a golden goose? Pleasure and a certain gain would be idyllic! The simplest men understand that. Do not the writers in Paris tell us that the French peasant on his marriage night, while embracing his bride with one arm, extends the other in order to feel the sack that contains her dowry?"

They were now on the upper floor of the tavern porch. Mr. Esdale Moore sent a Negro for a dish of tea, after the English fashion. Then he got a table at the end of the porch, somewhat apart, and the three men sat down.

"And now, Randolph" he said, "what did you find at Eastwood?"

"I am afraid," replied the Justice of the Peace, "that we found little new there. The evidence remains, with trifling additions, what it was; but Abner has arrived at some interesting opinions upon this evidence."

"I am sure Abner can clap his hand on the assassin," said the attorney. "Come sir, let me fill your cup, and while I stand on one foot, as St. Augustine used to say, tell me who ejected my uncle, the venerable Duncan Moore, out of life."

The Negro servant had returned with a great silver pot, and a tray of cups with queer kneeling purple cows on them.

Abner held out his cup.

"Sir" he said, "one must be very certain, to answer that question." His voice was deep and level, like some balanced element in nature.

He waited while the man filled the cup; then he replaced it on the table.

"And, sir," he continued slowly, "I am not yet precisely certain."

He slipped a lump of sugar slowly into the cup.

"It is the Ruler of Events who knows, sir; we can only conjecture. We cannot see the truth naked before us as He does; we must grope for it from one indication to another until we find it."

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"But, reason, Abner," interrupted the lawyer, bustling in his chair; "we have that, and God has nothing better!"

"Sir," replied Abner, "I cannot think of God depending on a thing so crude as reason. If one reflects upon it, I think one will immediately see that reason is a quality exclusively peculiar to the human mind. It is a thing that God could never, by any chance, require. Reason is the method by which those who do not know the truth, step by step, finally discover it."

He paused and looked out across the table at the far-off mountains.

"And so, sir, God knows who in Virginia has a red hand from this work at Eastwood Court, without assembling the evidence and laboring to determine whither these signboards point. But Randolph and I are like children with a puzzle. We must get all the pieces first, and then sit down and laboriously fit them up."

He looked down into his cup, his face in repose and reflective.

"Ah, sir," he went on, "if one could be certain that one had always every piece, there would no longer remain such a thing as a human mystery. Every event dovetails into every other event that precedes and follows. With the pieces complete, the truth could never elude us. But, alas, sir, human intelligence is feeble and easily deludes itself, and the relations and ramifications of events are vast and intricate."

"Then, sir," said Mr. Esdale Moore, "you do not believe that the criminal can create a series of false evidences that will be at all points consistent with the truth."

"No man can do it," replied Abner. "For to do that, one must know everything that goes before and everything that follows the event which one is attempting to falsify. And this omniscience only the intelligence of God can compass. It is impossible for the human mind to manufacture a false consistency of events except to a very limited extent."

"Then, gentlemen," cried the lawyer, "you can make me no excuse for leaving this affair a mystery."

"Yes," replied my uncle, "we could make you an excuse—a valid and sound excuse: the excuse of incompetency."

Mr. Esdale Moore laughed in his big hearty voice.

"With your reputation, Abner, and that of Squire Randolph in Virginia, I should refuse to receive it."

"Alas," continued Abner, "we are no better than other men. A certain experience, some knowledge of the habits of criminals, and a little skill in observation are the only advantages we have. If one were born among us with, let us say, a double equipment of skull space, no criminal would ever escape him."

"He would laugh at us, Abner," said the Justice.

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"He would never cease to laugh," returned my uncle, "but he would laugh the loudest at the bungling criminal. To him, the most cunning crime would be a botch; fabricated events would be conspicuous patchwork, and he would see the identity of the criminal agent in a thousand evidences."

He hesitated a moment; then he added, "Fortunately for human society, the inconsistency of false evidence is usually so glaring that any one of us is able to see it."

"As in Lord William Russell's case," said the Justice, "where the valet, having killed his master in such a manner as to create the aspect of suicide, inadvertently carried away the knife with which his victim was supposed to have cut his throat."

"Precisely," said Abner. "And there is, I think, in every case something equally inconsistent, if we only look close enough to find it."

He turned to Mr. Esdale Moore.

"With a little observation, sir, to ascertain the evidence, and a little common sense to interpret its intent, Randolph and I manage to get on."

The lawyer put a leading question.

"What glaring inconsistency did you find at Eastwood?" he said.

Abner looked at Randolph, as though for permission to go on. The Justice nodded.

"Why, this thing, sir," Abner answered, "that a secretary that was not locked should be broken open."

"But, Abner," said the lawyer, "who but myself knew that this secretary was not locked? It was the custom to lock it, although it contained nothing but my uncle's playing cards. As I told Randolph, on the day of my uncle's death I put the key down among the litter of papers inside the secretary; after I had opened it, and could not find it again, I merely closed the lid. But I alone knew this. Everybody else would imagine the secretary to be locked as usual."

"Not everybody," continued my uncle. "Reflect a moment: to believe the secretary locked on this night, one must have known that it was locked on every preceding night. To believe that it was locked on this night, because the lid was closed, one must have known that it was always locked on every preceding night when the lid was closed. And further, sir, one must have known this custom so well—one must have been so certain of it—that one knew it was not worthwhile to attempt to open the secretary by pulling down the lid on the chance that it might not be locked, and so, broke it open at once.

"Now, sir," he went on, "does this not exclude the theory that Duncan Moore was killed by a common burglar who entered the house for the purpose of committing a robbery? Such a criminal agent could not have known this custom. He might have believed the secretary to be locked, or imagined it

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to be, but he could not have known it conclusively. He could not have been so certain that he would fail to lay hold of the lid to make sure. One must assume the lowest criminal will act with some degree of intelligence."

"By Jove!" cried the attorney, striking the table, "I had a feeling that my uncle was not killed by a common thief! I thought the authorities were not at the bottom of this thing, and this is why I kept at Randolph, why I urged him to get you out to Eastwood Court."

"Sir," replied Abner, "I am obliged to you for the compliment. But your feeling was justified, and your persistence in this case will, I think, be rewarded. Nevertheless, sir, if you will pardon the digression, permit me to say that your remark interests me profoundly. Whence, I wonder, came this feeling that caused you to reject the obvious explanation and to urge a further and more elaborate inquiry?"

"Now, Abner," returned Mr. Esdale Moore, "I cannot answer that question. The thing was a kind of presentiment. I had a sort of feeling, as we express it. I cannot say more than that."

"I have had occasion," continued Abner, "to examine the theory of presentiments, and I find that we are forced to one of two conclusions: either they are of an origin exterior to the individual, of which we have no reliable proof, or they are founded upon some knowledge of which the correlation in the mind is, for the moment, obscure. That is to say, a feeling, presentiment, or premonition, may be a sort of shadow thrown by an unformed conclusion.

"An unconscious or subconscious mental process produces an impression. We take this impression to be from behind the stars, when, in fact, it merely indicates the rational conclusion at which we would have arrived if we had made a strong, conscious effort to understand the enigma before us."

He drank a little tea and put the cup back gently on the table.

"Perhaps, sir, if you had gone forward with the mental processes that produced your premonition, you would have worked out the solution of this mystery. Why, I wonder, did your deductions remain subconscious?"

"That is a question in mental science," replied the lawyer.

"Is not all science mental?" continued Abner. "Do not men take their facts in a bag to the philosopher that he may put them together? Let us reflect a moment, sir: are not the primitive emotions —as, for example, fear—in their initial stages always subconscious, or, as we say, instinctive? Thus, a thousand times in the day do not our bodies draw back from danger of which we are wholly unconscious? We do not go forward into these perils, and we pass on with no realization of their existence.

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Can we doubt, sir, that the mind also instinctively perceives danger at the end of certain mental processes and does not go forward upon them?"

The lawyer regarded my uncle in a sort of wonder.

"Abner," he said, "you forget my activities in this affair. It is I who have kept at Randolph. What instinctive fear, then, could have mentally restrained me?"

"Why, sir," replied Abner, "the same fear that instinctively restrained Randolph and myself."

Mr. Esdale Moore looked Abner in the face.

"What fear?" he said.

"The fear," continued Abner, "of what these deductions lead to."

Abner moved his chair a little nearer to the table and went on in a lower voice.

"Now, sir, if we exclude the untenable hypothesis that this crime was committed by an unknown thief, from the motive of robbery, what explanation remains? Let us see: this secretary could have been broken open only by someone who knew that it was the custom to keep it locked. Who was certain of that custom? Obviously, sir, only those in the household of the aged Duncan Moore."

The face of the lawyer showed a profound interest. He leaned over, put his right elbow on the table, rested his chin in the trough of the thumb and finger, and with his other hand took a box of cigarettes from his pocket and began to break it open. It was one of the elegancies of that day.

Abner went on, "Was it a servant at Eastwood Court?"

He paused, and Randolph interrupted.

"On the night of this tragedy," said the Justice of the Peace, "all the Negroes in the household attended a servants' ball on a neighboring estate. They went in a body and returned in a body. The aged Duncan Moore was alive when they left the house, and dead when they returned."

"But, Randolph," Abner went on, "independent of this chance event, conclusive in itself—which I feel is an accident to which we are hardly entitled—do not our inferences legitimately indicate a criminal agent other than a servant at Eastwood Court?

"Sane men do not commit violent crimes without a motive. There was no motive to move any servant except that of gain, and there was no gain to be derived from the death of the aged Duncan Moore, except that to be got from rifling his secretary. But the one who knew so much about this secretary that he was certain it was locked, would also have known enough about it to know that it contained nothing of value."

He hesitated and moved the handle of his cup.

"Now, sir," he added, "two persons remain."

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The lawyer, fingering the box of cigarettes, broke it open and presented them to Abner and Randolph. He lighted one, and over the table looked Abner in the face.

"You mean Northcote Moore and myself," he said in a firm, even voice. "Well, sir, which one was it?"

My uncle remained undisturbed.

"Sir," he said, "there was at least a pretense of consistency in the work of the one who manufactured the evidences of a burglar. There was a window open in the north wing at the end of the long, many-cornered passage that leads through Eastwood Court to the room in the south wing where the aged Duncan Moore was killed. Now someone had gone along that passage, as you pointed out to Randolph when Eastwood Court was first inspected, because there were fingerprints on the walls at the turns and angles. These fingerprints were marked in the dust on the walls of the passage on the east side, but on the west side, beginning heaviest near Duncan Moore's room, the prints were in blood.

"These marks on the wall show that the assassin did, in fact, enter by this passage from the north and return along it from the south. But he did not enter by the open window. The frame of this window was cemented into the casement with dust. This dust was removed only on the inside. Moreover, violence had been used to force it open, and the marks of this violence were all plainly visible on the inside of the frame."

He stopped, remained a moment silent, and then continued, "This corridor is the usual and customary way—in fact, the only way—leading from the north wing of Eastwood Court to the south wing. Duncan Moore alone occupied the south wing. And, sir, on this night Northcote Moore and yourself alone occupied the north wing. You were both equally familiar with this passage, since you both lived in the house and used it constantly."

Abner paused and looked at Mr. Esdale Moore.

"Shall I go on, sir?" he said.

"Pray do," replied the lawyer.

Abner continued, in his deep, level voice.

"Now, sir, you will realize why Randolph and I felt an instinctive fear of the result of these deductions, and perhaps, sir, why your subconscious conclusions went no further than a premonition."

"But the law of Virginia," put in the Justice, "is no respecter of persons. If the Governor should do a murder, his office would not save him from the gallows."

"It would not," said the lawyer. "Go on, Abner."

"If the aged Duncan Moore were removed," Abner continued, "Northcote Moore would take the manor-house and the lands. For Esdale Moore to take the estate, both

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the aged Duncan Moore and the present incumbent must be removed. Only the aged Duncan Moore was removed. Who was planning a gain, then, by his criminal act? Esdale Moore or Northcote Moore?

"Another significant thing: Mr. Esdale Moore knew this secretary was unlocked on this night; Northcote Moore did not. Who, then, was the more likely to break it open as evidence of a presumptive robbery?

"And, finally, sir, who would grope along this corridor feeling with his hands for the corners and angles of the wall, one who could see, or a blind man?"

Abner stopped and sat back in his chair.

The lawyer leaned over and put both arms on the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you amaze me! You accuse the most prominent man in Virginia."

"Before the law," said the Justice, "all men are equal."

The lawyer turned towards my uncle, as to one of more consideration.

"While you were making your deductions," he said, "I had to insist that you go on, for I was myself included. I was bound to hear you to the end, although you shocked me at every step. But now, I beg you to reflect. Northcote Moore belongs to an ancient and honorable family. He is old; he is blind. Surely something can be done to save him."

"Nothing," replied the Justice.

Abner lifted his face, placid, unmoving, like a mask.

"Perhaps," he said.

The two men before him at the table moved with astonishment.

"Perhaps!" cried the Justice of the Peace. "This is Virginia!"

But it was the lawyer who was the more amazed. He had not moved; he did not move; but his face became suddenly perplexed.

The tavern was now deserted; everyone had gone back into the courthouse. The three men were alone. There was silence except for the noises of the village and the far-off hum of winged insects in the air. Mr. Esdale Moore sat facing north along the upper porch; Abner opposite; Randolph looking eastward toward the courthouse. Abner did not go on at once. He reached across the table for one of the cigarettes. The lawyer mechanically took up the box with his hand nearest to the Justice of the Peace and opened the lid with his thumb and finger. Abner selected one but did not light it.

"Writers on the law," he began, "warn us against the obvious inference when dealing with the intelligent criminal agent, and for this reason: while the criminal of the lowest order seeks only to cover his identity, and the criminal of the second order to indicate another rather than himself, the criminal of the first order, sir, will sometimes undertake a subtle finesse—a double intention.

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"The criminal of the lowest order gives the authorities no one to suspect. The criminal of the second order sets up a straw man before his own door, hoping to mislead the authorities. But the criminal of the first order sets it before the door of another, expecting the authorities of the state to knock it down and take the man behind it.

"If Northcote Moore were hanged for murder, Esdale Moore would take the manor-house and the landed estate.

"And, if one were deliberately placing a straw man, would there be any inconsistency in breaking open a secretary obviously unlocked? The straw, sir, would be only a trifle more conspicuous!

"And the third deduction"—Abner's gray eyes narrowed, and he spoke slowly. "If one born blind, and another, were accustomed to go along a passage day after day; in the dark, who would grope, feeling his way in the night, step by step, along the angles of the wall?"

The amazed Justice struck the table with his clenched hand.

"By the gods," he cried, *"not the blind man!* For to the blind man, the passage was always dark!"

The lawyer had not moved, but his face, in its desperate perplexity, began to sweat. The Justice swung around upon him, but Abner put out his hand.

"A moment, Randolph," he said. "The human body is a curious structure. It has two sides, of which one of them is controlling and dominates the man, and when the task before him is difficult, it is with this more efficient controlling side that he approaches it.

"Thus, one set on murder and desperately anxious to make no sound, to make no false step, to strike no turn or angle, would instinctively follow the side of the wall that he could feel along with his controlling hand. This passage runs from north to south. The bloody fingerprints are all on the west side of the wall, the prints in the dust on the east side; therefore, the assassin followed the east side of the wall when he set out on his deadly errand, and the west side when he returned with blood on him.

"That is to say," and his voice lifted into a stronger note, "he always followed the left side of the wall.

"Why, sir?" And Abner got on his feet, his voice ringing, his finger pointing at the sweating, cornered man. "Because his controlling side was on the left—because he was left-handed!

"And you, sir, I have been watching you. You picked up the box of cigarettes with your hand nearest to Randolph—"

The pent-up energies of Mr. Esdale Moore seemed to burst asunder.

"It's a lie!" he cried.

And he lunged at Abner with his clenched left hand.

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WHEN LUCK'S RUNNING GOOD

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

(*continued from page 35*)

Phil rolled over and buried his face in the bed, giving away to the sickness he had fought down in Kapaloff's presence. He lay there and sobbed, weak and miserable, and his first thought was a buoying one: the torturing had been interrupted at the last moment, almost miraculously—his luck had held!

He worked himself into a sitting position and attempted to loosen the cords around his wrists and ankles. But he only drove them deeper into the flesh, so he gave it up. He wormed his way to the floor and slowly, laboriously went over the room in the dark, hunting for something that would serve to free him; but he found nothing. The shutters were bolted and padlocked; the door was massive. He returned to the bed.

Time passed—hours he had no means of counting—and then the door opened and Mikhail came in, a tray of food in his hands. He was followed by Kapaloff who went to a window and stood with his back to it while Mikhail set the tray on the table and untied Phil.

Kapaloff gestured toward the table. "I am sorry I cannot offer you greater hospitality, but my household is disorganized. I trust you will find my humble best not too uninviting."

Phil drew a chair to the table and ate. His appetite was poor, but he forced himself to eat with every appearance of enjoyment. When the food was disposed of he lighted one of the cigarettes on the tray and smiled his thanks.

"Unless you have reconsidered," the Russian said, "I regret that you will have to sleep tied. I am sorry, but I find myself in a position where I must not let my regard for you and my sense of what is due a guest outweigh the necessity of protecting my interests."

Phil shrugged. The food had heartened him, and he was too young not to meet the challenge of his captor's manner.

"I'm tough. Mind if I stretch my legs first?"

"Not at all! I want you to be as comfortable as may be. Walk about the room and smoke. You will sleep the better for it."

Phil left the table and slowly paced up and down the room, turning over in his mind the latest development in this game. Kapaloff had entered the room behind Mikhail, had kept his right hand in his jacket pocket, and had not allowed his servant to get out of the range of his vision for an instant. If Kapaloff couldn't trust Mikhail, perhaps Phil could. The man was standing across the room from Kapaloff. His face showed nothing.

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Kapaloff was asking: "You are still obdurate then, and will not make terms?"

"I'm willing to make terms—but not to accept the ones you have made."

Passing the table, Phil's glance fell on the knife with which he had cut his meat. It was silver and of little value as a weapon, but it would serve to cut the cords with which he had been bound. He reached the wall and turned. The cigarette between his lips was but a stub now. He went to the table and selected a fresh cigarette.

Reaching for a match, he placed his body between Kapaloff and the tray. Mikhail, on the other side of the room, could see every movement of Phil's hands. Fumbling with the matches, he picked up the knife with his left hand and slid it up his sleeve. Mikhail's face was expressionless.

Phil turned with the lighted cigarette in his mouth and resumed his pacing, thrusting his hands in his trouser pockets and allowing the knife to slide down into one of them. He reached the end of the room and started to turn. His elbows were seized, and he looked over his shoulder into Mikhail's stolid face.

Mikhail drew the knife from the pocket, returned it to the tray, and went back to his post by the wall.

Kapaloff spoke approvingly to Mikhail in Russian, and then said to Phil, "I did not see you get it. But, behold, you cannot put faith even in the disloyalty of my servitors!"

Phil felt tired and spent—he had counted on the scarred man's help. He went to the bed and Mikhail bound him. Then the lights were turned off and he was left alone.

The sound of a key being turned slowly, cautiously, in the door awakened Phil from the fitful sleep into which he had fallen. The noise stopped. He could see nothing. Something touched the sole of one bare foot and he jumped convulsively, shaking the bed.

"Sh-h-h!"

A cool, soft hand touched his cheek, and he whispered, "Romaine?"

"Yes. Be still while I cut the cords."

Her hands passed down his arms, and his hands were freed. A little more fumbling in the dark and his feet were loose. He sat up suddenly and their faces bumped in the dark, and quite without premeditation he kissed her. For an instant she clung to him. Then she retreated a few inches, and said, "But first we must hurry."

"Sure," he agreed. "What do we do next?"

"Go downstairs to the front of the house and wait until we hear the dogs in the rear. Mikhail will call them back there under some pretext and hold them until we get out of the yard."

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She pressed a heavy revolver into Phil's hand.

"But aren't the dogs kept locked up?"

"No."

"They were last night," Phil insisted, "or I never would have made it."

"Oh, yes! Uncle Boris expected you, and kept them in the garage until after you arrived."

"Oh." So he had done what was expected of him! "Well, if Mikhail's with us, why not slip down and grab your uncle and wind this thing up?"

"No! Mikhail wouldn't help us do that. Even when his brother was killed before his eyes he would do nothing. For generations his people have been serfs, slaves, of uncle's—and he hasn't the courage to defy him. If he's to help at all it must be secretly. If it comes to a point where he must choose, he will be with uncle."

"All right, let's go." His bare feet touched the floor and he laughed. "I haven't seen my shoes since I came through the window. I'm going to have a lot of fun running around on my naked tootsies!"

She took his hand and led him to the door. They listened but heard nothing. They crept out into the hall and toward the stairs. An electric light over the stairs gave a dim glow. They halted while Phil mounted the balustrade and unscrewed the bulb, shrouding the steps in darkness. At the foot of the flight they halted again, and Phil darkened the light there. Then she guided him toward the front door.

Somewhere in the night behind them a door opened. A noise of something slid across the floor. Then they heard Kapaloff's mellow tones:

"Children, you had best return to your rooms. There really is nothing else to do. If you move toward the door, you will show up in the moonlight that is shining through there. On the other hand, I have thoughtfully pushed a chair a little way down the hall from where I am, so that even if you could creep silently upon me you must inevitably collide with the chair and give me an inkling of where to send my bullets. So there is really nothing else for you to do but return to your rooms."

Huddled against the wall, Phil and Romaine said nothing, but in the hearts of each a desperate hope was born. Kapaloff chuckled as he killed their hopes.

"You need expect nothing from Mikhail. Your escape meant nothing to him, but he trusted you to exact the vengeance that he is too much for the serf to take himself. So he supplied you with a weapon, I suppose, and sent you down into the hall. Then he pretended to hear a noise—thinking that I would rush out here to fall before your bullets. Happily, I know something of the peasant mind. So when he started and pretended to hear something

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that my keener ears missed, I knocked him down with my pistol and came out here knowing just what to expect. Now I must insist that you return to your rooms."

Phil pressed the girl down until she lay flat on the floor, close to the wall. He stretched out in front of her, his eyes trying to dissolve the darkness. Kapaloff was lying on the floor somewhere ahead—but which wall was he clinging to? In a room something of his position could have been learned from his voice, but in this narrow passage all sense of direction was lost. The sounds simply came out of the night.

The Russian's cultured voice reached them again. "You know, we are on the verge of making ourselves ridiculous. This reclining in the dark would be well enough except that I fancy we are both exceptionally patient beings. Hence, it is likely to be prolonged to an absurd length."

With the hand that was not occupied with the revolver Phil felt in his pockets. In a vest pocket he found several coins. He tossed one of them down the hall; it hit a wall and fell to the floor.

Kapaloff laughed. "I was thinking of doing that, too; but it isn't easy to imitate the sound of a person in motion."

Phil cursed under his breath. "There must be some way out of this hole!"

Toward the front the hall was too light, as Kapaloff has said; and there seemed to be no other exits except by the stairs, or past the Russian. He might chance a volley—but there was the girl to consider. He never questioned that Kapaloff would shoot. Romaine crawled to his side.

"If we go upstairs," she whispered, "we are trapped."

"Can you think of anything?"

"No." And then she clutched his arm. "I believe he has gone. It feels as if no one else was here."

"What would that mean?"

"The dogs, maybe!"

He thought of the sinewy bodies and dripping jaws he had seen in the yard, and shuddered.

"You wait here," he ordered, and started crawling silently toward the rear of the hall.

After it seemed that he must have gone a hundred feet his hand touched the chair of which Kapaloff had spoken. He moved it aside carefully, and went on. His fingers touched a door-frame—the end of the hall.

He whispered to the girl, "He's gone," and she joined him.

"Shall we make a break for it?" he asked.

"Yes. Better try the back."

Three steps they took into the darkness, and then the lights clicked on and Phil found himself helpless, his arms pinned in Mikhail's powerful embrace. Kapaloff plucked the revolver from Phil's hand and smiled into his face.

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"The variable Mikhail—whom you see allied with me again—has a tough head, and I feared that my blow would not quiet him for long. You can imagine in what an unenviable position I found myself out in the hall—with you ahead and my erratic compatriot behind. When I could stand it no longer I came back and resuscitated him, enlisting him on my side again."

Mikhail released Phil and stepped back. Kapaloff went on, with a gay mockery of plaintiveness:

"You will readily understand, Mr. Truax, that I cannot go on this way. A few more days of this and I shall be a wreck. I am a simple soul and cannot bear this distraction. You have seen Romaine. Do you accept my terms?"

Phil shook off the feeling of disgust with himself for having been so easily recaptured and decided to play the same game he had played before: bluff until the actual pain came. He smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid we'll never agree."

Kapaloff sighed. "I shall attend to the rites myself this time; so do not expect an outburst of tenderness to halt them. Though my heart bleeds for you my hands will be steady."

Then the girl spoke. Her voice was tense, vibrant. Both men turned toward her. She was speaking to Mikhail, in Russian. Her voice gradually sank lower and lower until it was but a murmur, and took on an urgent, pleading tone.

Mikhail's lips were pressing together with increasing tension, and his carriage became rigid. His eyes fixed on a spot on the opposite wall.

Phil shot a puzzled look at Kapaloff and saw that he was watching his niece and servant with dancing eyes.

The girl's voice crooned on and moisture came out on Mikhail's face. His mouth was a thin, straight line now, and the skin over the knuckles of his clenched hands seemed about to split from the strain. Still Romaine talked and, as she mentioned Serge's name, suddenly it came to Phil what was happening.

She was making an open appeal to Mikhail, reminding him of his brother's death, goading him into desperation!

The man's eyes were distended and the scar across his nose was a vivid gash—it might have been made yesterday. The muscles of his forehead, jaws, and neck stood out like welts; his breath hissed through quivering nostrils.

Still the girl's voice went on.

Phil looked at Kapaloff again. A sardonic smile of amused expectancy was on his face. He spoke softly, mockingly, a few words, but neither the girl nor Mikhail heeded him. Her voice droned on—a monotonous chant.

Mikhail's great fists opened and drops of blood ran down his fingers from where his nails had bitten into

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the palms. Slowly he turned and met his master's eyes. For a second the eyes held, but Mikhail's heritage of servility was too strong within him. His eyes dropped and he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

The girl gave him no rest. The syllables came from her lips in a torrent, and her voice went abruptly high and sharp. Despite his unfamiliarity with the language, Phil felt his pulse drumming under the beat of her tone.

Mikhail's shoulders swayed slowly and a white froth appeared in the corners of his mouth. Then his face lost every human quality. A metallic snarl rasped from deep in his chest. Without turning, without looking, he sprang upon the man who had killed his brother. There was no interval the eye could discern. He was standing, swaying, looking at the floor with bulging, bloodshot eyes. Then he was upon Kapaloff and they were rolling on the floor. There was no appreciable interim.

Kapaloff discharged his pistol once, but Phil could not see where the bullet hit. Over and over they rolled—Mikhail a brute gone mad, blindly fumbling for a grip on his enemy's throat; Kapaloff fighting with every trick in his cool head, and as little disturbed as if it were a game. His eyes met Phil's over Mikhail's shoulder, and he made a grimace of distaste.

Then Kapaloff twisted free, whirled to his feet, dashed a foot into the face of his rising assailant, and vanished into the dark of the hall. The kick carried Mikhail over backward, but he was up immediately, bellowing and plunging after Kapaloff.

Phil picked up the weapon Kapaloff had dropped—the revolver he had taken from Phil—and turned to the girl. Her hands were over her face and she was trembling violently. He shook her.

"Where's the phone?"

She tried twice, and finally spoke. "In the next room."

He patted her cheek. "You phone the police and wait for me here."

She clung to him for a moment, then pulled herself together, and went into the next room.

Phil moved to the hall door and listened. A scuffling sound and Kapaloff's mocking chuckle came from somewhere on the stairs. A shot thundered. Mikhail bellowed. Phil felt his way to the foot of the stairs and started up.

From above came the noise of a struggle, and Mikhail's rasping breath. Two shots. A body fell, sliding down the steps. Phil had gained the second floor and was climbing toward the third. The sliding body came toward him. He recognized it as Mikhail by the gibbering snarls it emitted. Kapaloff's laugh came from the head of the stairs.

As he braced his legs to halt Mikhail's descent, Phil raised his re-

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volver and fired into the darkness above. Streaks of orange flame darted down at him; a bullet burned his cheek; others hit around him. Then the man at his feet was dragging him down with grim fingers that felt for his throat. He screamed into Mikhail's ear, trying to bring comprehension to the man that his enemy was above, that he was attacking an ally. But the crushing fingers felt their way higher and higher up Phil's chest, closed about his throat.

With a desperate summoning of his failing strength Phil drove his pistol into the face he could not see in the dark, and wrenched himself away. The fingers slipped, clutched at him, missed, and Phil was stumbling up the steps ahead of something that had been a man, but was now a rabid thing clambering through the night, with death in its heart and no understanding of the difference between friend and enemy.

Phil reached the top of the stairs and, not knowing it in the dark, reached for the next step, stumbled, and fell forward in the hall. As he fell Kapaloff's pistol spat, bringing down a shower of plaster. At the head of the stairs Mikhail was snarling. Phil rolled, jerking himself to one side, and pressed against the wainscoting, just in time to let the madman charge past.

Two more shots rang out.

Then a bestial voice rose in a bellow of insane triumph, a scuffle, a groan so faint that it might have been a sigh, heavy bodies falling . . . silence.

Phil got to his feet and advanced warily up the hall. His legs touched a body. Something liquid, warm and sticky, was under his bare feet.

He stumbled on and opened the first door he reached. He found the light button and pressed it. Then he turned and looked down the hall in the light that came through the open doorway . . .

He closed his eyes and groped his way to the stairs, down to the room where he had left the girl.

The girl ran to him. "Your face! You are hurt!"

"Just a scratch. I had forgotten it."

She drew his head down and dabbed at his torn cheek with a handkerchief.

"The others?" she asked.

"Dead. Did you get the police?"

She said, "Yes," and then could no longer withstand the weakness that tugged at her. She dropped into his arms, sobbing. He carried her to a couch and knelt beside her, stroking her hands and soothing her.

When she had mastered her weakness sufficiently to sit up, he asked her, more to take her mind from the gruesome termination of the affair than because his curiosity was so pressing, "Now, what's this all about?"

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As she talked she gradually regained her composure, and the dread that the night's events had stirred within her subsided. Her voice grew steadier, her words more coherent, and some measure of color returned to her cheeks.

Her father had been a Russian nobleman, her mother an American. Her mother had died when Romaine was still a child. Later the little girl had been sent to a convent in the United States, in accordance with her mother's desire.

When the war broke out in Europe she had returned to Russia, despite her father's orders, with the childish thought that she would be near him. She had seen him twice before his death. He was reported "killed in action" shortly before the revolution. His brother Boris had been appointed her guardian and administrator of the estate.

Then the revolution came. Her uncle had foreseen the uprising and had converted much of the girl's wealth—he had no personal means—into money, which he had deposited in English and French banks. When they were forced to leave their native land they had considerable wealth at their disposal. For the next few years they had moved from place to place.

Her uncle had seemed filled with a strange uneasiness, and would seldom stay long in one city or country. He had taken the name of Kapaloff and had persuaded the girl to do likewise, though he had given no reason for the change. Finally they came to the United States lived in various cities, and then came to Burlingame.

Since their departure from Russia her uncle had been withdrawing more and more from society, and frowning upon Romaine's desire for friends. In the United States she had made no new acquaintances. He had selected the most isolated house he could find in Burlingame and had had the windows fitted with heavy shutters, and massive doors and bolts installed.

She had wondered at the change in him but had never questioned him. His manner toward her was, as always, affectionate, protecting, and generous. Except in the matter of making new acquaintances—and he was not crudely insistent there—he allowed her to indulge every whim.

Then, late the preceding Monday night, she had found the letter that was in the bag. She had found it on the library floor, had picked it up carelessly to lay it on the table, from which she supposed it had blown. Her eyes had fallen upon the word *murder,* in Russian, heavily underscored.

She read the next few words, and then feverishly read the letter from beginning to end. It had been written to her uncle by someone who apparently had been very intimate with him in Russia, and boldly threatened that unless Boris paid the money he had promised, the

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truth about his brother's *murder* would be published.

She could not miss the import of the letter. It could mean but one thing: that Boris, whose own means had been dissipated, had had his brother killed so that he might gain control of the estate until the child became of age.

Dazed and bewildered, she went to her room, carrying the letter with her, and threw herself across the bed. But she had something to do. She knew of only one person to whom she could turn—a prominent Los Angeles attorney, the father of one of her schoolmates.

She took what money she had, left the house, got in her roadster, and started for the city, intending to take the first train to Los Angeles. But she had wasted too much time. Her uncle had missed the letter and, fearing the worst, had gone to her room. Not finding her there, he had come downstairs just as she drove away. He had sent Mikhail and Serge in another car to bring her back. They had done so, but the bag had been lost in the scuffle on Washington Street.

She had been imprisoned in her room until the afternoon, when she was taken to call on Phil. Her uncle had coached her carefully and she feared him too much to risk open defiance; but she had mastered her fright sufficiently to drop her purse and signal Phil. Then she had been brought back to the house and locked in. She had made one attempt to escape but had been caught at the window.

Phil tried to keep her mind on her story but he missed great stretches of it, watching her face, which, with youthful resilience, was regaining its bloom. The shadows that lingered under the eyes enhanced their beauty.

When she had finished they were silent for a moment. Phil wondered how much of the story he had missed. He cleared his throat and said, "You'll probably have to stay in Burlingame for a day or two until the police get through with their investigating. But if you'll give me that fellow's address—the Los Angeles lawyer—I'll wire him to come up and take you back with him when it's all over."

She looked puzzled. "But everything is all right now. I won't have to bother him."

"You'll need him. There'll be lots of trouble straightening out your affairs and your uncle's; and you'll have to have somebody to take care of you."

"But you are—" She stopped and the blood flooded her face.

Phil shook his head emphatically. "Listen! I would—" He stopped, cleared his throat, and tried again. "We are going to do this different. You are going to have this lawyer made your legal guardian. If you don't, the courts will probably appoint some old bum who happens to be a friend of the judge's. Then I'm going to convince him that I'm

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—that I'm not too tough an egg. And then we'll see."

A strange speech for one whose creed was: When your luck runs good, force it!

The girl frowned. "But—"

"Now don't argue! I haven't got what you might call a spotless record. Nothing so terrible maybe, but plenty that's bad enough. And another thing: you've got money, and I—well, when the cards run right I have enough to eat regular; then they run wrong . . . Anyway, we'll see. I'll do my talking to this lawyer fellow after he's made your guardian."

The doorbell forestalled the girl's answer. Phil went to the door, where four uniformed policemen stood, using their nightsticks to keep the hounds at bay. Phil led them back to the room where the girl was waiting and told his story briefly.

The grizzled sergeant in charge stared with round eyes from the girl to the youth with bloodstained bare feet, but he made no comment. Leaving one man with Phil and Romaine, he led the others upstairs.

Fifteen minutes later he returned.

"I thought you said the dead men were in the hall?"

"That's right," Phil said.

The sergeant shook his head.

"They're both dead, all right, and one of 'em is in the hall with half a dozen bullets in him. But we found the other one in one of the rooms—all mangled up—leaning over a sort of desk, with this under his arm."

He held out a sheet of notepaper to Phil. In a small, firm, regular handwriting, but thickly besmeared with blood, was written:

My dear Romaine,

Leaving you, I want to extend to both you and your new-found champion my heartiest wish that joy and happiness attend you.

My only regret is that so little of your heritage remains—but I was always careless with money! I advise you to cling to Mr. Truax—never have I seen a more promising young man. And he has at least three hundred and fifty dollars!

There is much that I would write, but my strength is going and I fear that my pen will waver. And I who have never shown a sign of weakness in my life am vain enough to desire that I leave this gentle world with that record intact.

Affectionately,
Uncle Boris

EDITORS' NOTE: *We often wonder if mystery fans—even the aficionados of the genre—realize how different today's detective story is from the tale of detection written only a generation ago. A big change has come about—more than a shift from the original whodunit to the middle period of the howdunit to the contemporary why-*

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dunit. Today the technique is different—and even more important, the thinking is different.

Dashiell Hammett's "When Luck's Running Good" was first published in 1923. If Mr. Hammett were writing now, he could not possibly have concocted a plot like the one you have just read—no more than a present-day motion picture studio could produce "The Perils of Pauline" or "The Exploits of Elaine." Action alone is not enough. Damsels in distress and heroes in the tarnished armor of toughness are not enough. The characters have to reveal greater depth, the action has to reveal greater inevitability. Motivations have to be probed more psychologically and what people do must be what they would do in real life—not what the author wants them to do for the author's convenience.

Take a simple example from "When Luck's Running Good": surely Uncle Boris, as a villain, is a worthy adversary in hardness, determination, and general evil; surely too he has the mental equipment to match the physical—brains to match brawn. Then why, we all ask, did he leave the letter on the library table?—the letter that accused him of murdering his brother. Why didn't he burn the letter?—or, at least, keep it in a safe place instead of in the open where it could be found and read by his niece?

A contemporary writer would have to ask himself these questions —and answer them in terms of credible, convincing characterization and/or action . . . And that is only a tiny facet in the creative cutting —the demands of modern technique extend to every detail in the dovetailing of a thousand causes and effects.

The superior detective story of today is a mature art form. Make no mistake about that—the detective story has come of age.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**JOSEPH R. MARSHALL**
TITLE:	***Murder in an Artists' Colony***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Chief of Police "Obie" O'Brien
LOCALE:	Bayhead, United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Chief "Obie" was just a fat old village cop. The only police work he ever did was to give out traffic tickets to the summer residents. And here was a murder—and no motive . . .*

IT'S TOO HOT," SHE SAID, "TOO frightfully hot to go over it all again, and too horrible. To think of poor Lila out there in the sand." She stared out the window at the sunlit beach and the ocean.

Outside it was a hot Bayhead day. But it wasn't hot in the air-conditioned house. I sat on the white satin sofa and rolled down the sleeves of my uniform. I had been sweating outside and my skin was clammy.

"I know it's been tough, Mrs. May," I said. "But none of us can ignore murder."

She turned. Even in a housecoat that covered her from neck to toes, she was a handsome woman. Too full-bodied, maybe, but it was a good many years since she had been a fashion model.

"You all talk about murder," she said. "I am not convinced it was. Lila was not getting along with Mario—with Mr. Manicotti—and she was a high-strung person. It's entirely possible she decided to take her own life."

"Maybe," I said. "But it was a tough way to do it."

"If she was murdered," she said, "it probably was one of those people who come over at night and wander around the dunes. I assume you and the sheriff are checking them."

"Mrs. May," I said. "We're trying to find out everything we can. You started the artist colony here. I

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thought you could give me a general idea of what has been going on."

"Nothing is going on!" she snapped. "Artists are just like other people, Mr. O'Brien, except they like to be left alone more."

"She was well-liked?" I asked.

Mrs. Jean May walked across the room and stood by the door. "Officer O'Brien," she said, "I realize the village police feel a certain sense of responsibility, but I understood the sheriff was in charge of the investigation. I told him everything I could last night, and I'm rather upset. Now, if you will excuse me."

I got up slowly.

She went on, "Mary will show you out." She pushed a wall button and added, "The sheriff had a young lady take notes all through his interview with me. I'm sure they're complete enough to answer any questions you may have."

"Maybe," I said. "There was a wild party last night, wasn't there?"

"Wild parties are a figment of Bayhead's imagination," she said, snapping again. "Certainly there was a picnic on the beach, and you can ask anyone who was there what went on. But you'll find it was all rather sedate."

Mary appeared in the doorway. Mrs. May put out her hand. "Good day, Officer O'Brien," she said. "I do hope you will be successful. I want Bayhead to get over this tragedy quickly." Her hand was small and cold and firm.

I walked with Mary down the hall and through the living room where the bright sunlight penetrated even the dark shades to gleam on the polished floors.

"Does she always dress like that?" I asked.

Mary had grown up in Bayhead. I had picked up her old man about twenty times for hitting the booze. He worked at the big Gulf station north of the village.

"Usually she wears shorts," Mary said. "But she turned the air conditioning up. She doesn't like the hot days. She only goes out to take a swim."

"You like working for her?"

Mary shrugged. She had light, Irish-blue eyes and she would have been married the year she got out of high school if it hadn't been for the old man. He chased the boys away. Now she was going to marry Harry Perse. Harry worked in the hardware store, and they were both putting money in the bank.

"She takes good care of herself," Mary said. "You wouldn't think she's over forty. But she's been upset since they found Mrs. Manicotti. I think she cried all night."

"They were friends?"

"They were good friends, and Mr. and Mrs. Manicotti used to come over here all the time. Everyone's talking about the murder, Mr. O'Brien. Don't they have any idea who did it?"

I shook my head. "It was pretty bad," I said. "But you let the sher-

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iff worry about it. He has plenty of detectives and equipment."

I stepped out into the hot sunlight, and I was sweating again before I crossed the lawn to the old patrol car. The village of Bayhead hadn't been able to afford a new car for either Bernie or me for three years now.

I drove back to the office. When it's hot—and Bayhead is usually hot all summer—everyone stays out of the village until late in the afternoon. I parked behind the supermarket and went into the office the back way. The telephone was ringing. I let it ring. It would be one of the newspapermen from Clinton, or Mayor Daley screaming for action.

I sat down behind the desk, and after a few moments the telephone stopped ringing. I heard Bernie's car pull up in the lot. He always parked right under the window. I lit a cigar and waited for him. It's funny the way a cigar is cool on hot days—rich and cool. I watched the smoke hang in the air. There wasn't a hint of breeze.

Bernie came in out of the bright sun. He kicked the door closed behind him and blinked at me in the dimness. Sweat had soaked right through his blue shirt. "Hot as blazes," he said. "I went out on the beach like you said. Everyone's over there, and they're all in swimming. They're all talking about it."

"You'd think they'd stay away from the beach," I said.

"Every one of them has to take a look. You can still see some blood on the dune grass. The sheriff has it roped off and they're still taking pictures and measurements and sifting through the sand."

"The sheriff has a good bunch of men," I said. "We're just village cops. But you know, Bernie, they spend so much time looking for clues, sometimes I think they forget that it's people who commit crimes."

He wiped the sweat off his face. "I don't get you," he said.

"Lots of times," I said, "there may not be any clues. But there always has to be a reason, Bernie, a motive. They spend all their time looking for clues."

"So now you're a detective," he said. "Fifteen years riding around Bayhead, and you're a detective."

"I know," I said. "I'm getting old and fat."

"I remember her," Bernie said. "I gave her a ticket once—about a month ago. It was on the old schoolhouse road. She was a pretty little thing."

"She looked like a kid," I said. "She was a painter, but she gave it up when she married Manicotti."

Bernie sat down in the chair in the corner and opened his tie. He spread out over the little chair seat. He was getting fat, too, from too much sitting and cruising around Bayhead.

"I didn't see any of the artists at the beach," he mumbled.

The telephone rang, and I let it.

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"It might be something important," Bernie said.

"It's probably Daley yelling we have to make an arrest."

"What does he think?" Bernie said. "We can do better than the sheriff's office, and the sheriff has six men on it? All we do is give tickets around here. He's like my old lady. She was telling me this morning about how horrible it was." He added, "You should answer it, though."

I picked it up. "Police," I said.

"Is this Chief O'Brien?"

"Yes," I said.

"This is Mario Manicotti. I would like to talk with you if you'll be in."

"Come on down," I said.

"I'll be there in about ten minutes." He paused. "I wonder if it could be confidential," he said. "You see, I want your advice."

"You come on down and we'll see," I said. "You can come in the back way if you like. There's a rear door to the office that opens on the parking lot behind the supermarket."

"Thanks, Chief," he said. "I'll be down there in a few minutes." And he hung up.

"Manicotti," I said to Bernie.

"He's a strange guy," Bernie said. "Always roaring with laughter when anything strikes him funny, and he's supposed to be a great painter. I went past his place but it was closed up tight. Sheriff only questioned him about an hour last night."

I sat back and put my feet up on the desk, and sucked in deep on the cigar.

Bernie asked, "Mayor Daley's really hopped up?"

"He said if we don't get busy, he'll get himself a new police force."

Bernie grinned. "Where's he going to get two guys at the dough they pay?"

"He says Bayhead has become notorious overnight."

"The hell with him," Bernie said. He stood up, hoisted his belt up on his belly, and scratched his balding head. "Boy, it sure is hot. You know, Obie, the good mayor and Mrs. May, they wanted those artists here. They said the artists would put Bayhead on the map. They sure have."

"Why don't you get something to eat?" I suggested. "Manicotti wants to talk to me alone."

"All I want is a beer," Bernie said. "I'll be over at Frank's if you need me. Don't let the mayor get you down, Obie. What'd you tell him we were doing?"

"I told him we were thinking."

"That's good," Bernie said. "You think he's serious about firing us?"

"He wants to get re-elected."

Bernie pulled open the door and put his hat on while he was standing in the sunlight. "Maybe you should play detective," he said. He closed the door and shambled off.

I picked up the telephone and got Millie, the girl at the village switchboard, and told her no more calls

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unless it was important or it was the sheriff's office or the mayor. Then I sat back, relit my cigar, and tried to think.

Bayhead is a little town by the ocean. In the winter it just about closes up, and Bernie and I don't have much to do. I don't think we average a burglary in two years, and most of them are just kids breaking into the summer houses. In the summer a lot of rich people come out from Clinton, which is a pretty big city, and they have houses on the sand dunes. The only trouble they give us is speeding.

Mrs. May was one of the summer people. She used to come out with her husband. He was a big advertising man in Clinton, and I guess he left her plenty. After he died, she got Manicotti and his wife to move out here, and pretty soon there was a regular colony of artists. At first, folks weren't too happy about it. Manicotti was famous for his nudes, and the women wore bikinis on the beach and shorts in town. The village had to pass a couple of ordinances to stop it.

But Mayor Daley kept saying how the artists would put Bayhead on the map, and Mrs. May talked to the Ladies' Garden Club. Manicotti went to a couple of Rotary luncheons. But it was Mrs. Manicotti, Lila, who sold most of the folks in town on the artists.

She was little and pretty, with short hair and a big smile, and she gave the kids free painting lessons at the beach every day. That did it. When the lessons were over, she'd paint Indian faces or arrows or blanket designs on the kids, and the kids wouldn't go in swimming for hours just so they wouldn't wash off. At a couple of beach parties she did the same thing on the artists. Manicotti always roared with laughter. She would paint faces on his back so every time he'd move his arms, the faces would smile.

Manicotti was a big man and tanned almost black. He was always on the beach painting, and you'd see him sitting behind an easel for hours. He finished the nudes in his studio, so that didn't bother folks much.

But there was no reason why anyone should murder Mrs. Manicotti. The husband had found her last night, lying in a hollow in the dunes, with one of those artist's paintbrushes sticking out backward in her side. The brush had made a good weapon for somebody. It was long and thin and the handle came to a point at the top. She would have had a tough time stabbing herself, and she wasn't the kind, anyway, to commit suicide.

The telephone rang again before Manicotti arrived. This time it was Daley, and he yelled that Bernie and I should do something—as if there was something two old village cops could do.

"If you guys don't look busy," he said, "you'll both get fired. I guarantee it. The whole town's talking."

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"Take it easy, Jim," I said. "The sheriff is doing everything he can, and there's only two of us."

"Listen to me," he yelled. I had to move the telephone away from my ear. "I don't expect you to solve it. But at least look busy!"

"I'm thinking, Jim," I said. "Maybe I can come up with something."

"Don't think," he said, "*do* something. Let the sheriff's deputies do the thinking. Just you and Bernie look busy."

"I can't do anything with you keeping me on the telephone."

He spluttered. "I'm warning you, O'Brien, you two don't look busy, I'll fire you both."

"Goodbye, Jim," I said, and hung up.

I lit another cigar and watched the blue-white smoke for a while. I could feel the sweat trickling down my neck. Sometimes the sea breeze started in Bayhead early in the afternoon, but it wasn't going to get cooler until the sun set.

Manicotti knocked and I told him to come in, and got up and shook his hand. He was big enough to be a professional football player.

"I appreciate your seeing me," he said.

"It's my job," I said. "I wanted to talk to you anyway." I pulled the chair out of the corner for him, and he slumped down into it.

"A thing like this," he said. "It takes a while to hit home. I didn't get any sleep last night, and I suppose it will get worse."

"What'd you do to your hand?" He had a bandage on it.

"I was half out of my mind," he said. "I hit the wall a couple of times. Pain feels good sometimes."

"Yes," I said. I sat behind the desk and looked at him. There were bags under his eyes and he swallowed hard.

"I didn't tell the sheriff," he said, "but I want you to know. You can tell the sheriff if you think it's important. You know, Lila liked you. She thought it was pretty wonderful the way you went to bat for those kids."

"The boys who broke into the old Maston place?"

"Yes," he said. "She thought a lot of you."

I stubbed out the cigar. "You get to be an old, fat village cop," I said. "You should have a few friends."

"That's why I came to you. I'm sure she didn't kill herself, but it is a possibility."

"Why is it?" I said.

"I was going to get a divorce. I told Lila three days ago."

"Why?"

"Who knows?" he shrugged. "Once she had been everything to me, but sometimes love creeps away and you don't notice until it's gone. We'd been married six years, and we weren't in love any more."

"She didn't want a divorce?"

He stared at me. He was hurting. "No," he said, "she didn't."

I put it to him straight. "You think she killed herself?"

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"I don't know," he said. "It wouldn't be like her. I don't think so—but I don't know."

"I don't think so either," I said. "Was there any other woman involved in this, Mr. Manicotti?"

"No," he said, "not really. But Lila may have thought so. I've been using Jean—Mrs. May—as a model. You know I do nudes. But an artist's wife understands."

"You're painting Mrs. May now?"

"I was last week, and the picture is far from finished. These things are difficult to explain. You see, I wanted a strong picture, one with force, and I needed a model with strength. Most of the women models you get, they are either thin or heavy, without strength or force. Do you understand?"

"Your wife didn't like the idea?"

"She didn't really object, until I told her I wanted a divorce. Then I suppose she thought Jean had something to do with it."

I stood up and walked over to the window. "I wonder if you'd tell me about the party—particularly, who was there."

"The usual group. It was a quiet beach party. Some of the kids flew kites. Lila seemed happy, full of fun. She painted the kids, and then some faces on the children. She was always doing that to amuse us. She made people look very funny."

"You had dinner on the beach?"

"We eat on the beach two or three nights a week—charcoal steaks or cold cuts, just normal beach dinners. Lila was in a gay mood, and after dinner she painted some of us."

"Who did she paint?"

"Me. The usual faces on my back. And some of the women too. You see, after it gets dark we often break up and the girls go swimming by themselves. That way we don't have to wear suits."

"That was all?" I said.

"It broke up early, and Lila went for a walk down the beach. I waited at the house, but she didn't return for two hours and I went looking for her, and—well, I found her." He leaned forward and put his face in his big hands.

Outside I heard a car go by, and I thought, maybe it *was* suicide. "She hadn't been sick," I said, "despondent or upset about the divorce?"

He shook his head. He looked up and tried to smile. "Lila was healthy as a horse. The only thing she ever had was athlete's foot, and she caught that from the kids."

He got up. "I'm sorry," he said. "I need a drink."

"Thanks for coming down," I said. "Maybe it will help."

"If I get my hands on whoever did it—"

"We'll find him," I said.

He went out into the sunlight. He was big, but his shoulders were bent. He wasn't in very good shape.

Waiting for Bernie to come back, I tried to put it all together. I was

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sure it hadn't been any of the people who sneak over for a swim at night—she hadn't been molested. It had to be someone who knew her. But no one had a reason. Find the reason, and you'll find the murderer. It also had to be done in anger, all of a sudden, because the killer had used the first handy weapon, the victim's own paintbrush.

I lit another cigar. Here was old Obie, fat in the rear and the only police work he ever did was to give out traffic tickets, and *he* was going to solve everything.

But that paintbrush kept sticking in my mind. I wondered why she had a paintbrush with her on a walk at night. I picked up the telephone, called the sheriff's office, and got the laboratory.

Yes, they had worked on the paintbrush. No, the fingerprints were smeared, and anyway it was covered with purple paint and blood.

"What color paint?"

"Purple," he said. "It stained."

"Do me a favor," I said, "get me something on that paint. And call me back, will you?"

"It's just paint," he said.

I hung up and walked around the office sweating, but I didn't want to sit down. First a paintbrush and then paint that stained. Oil paint wouldn't stain wood, or would it?

Bernie came back, and he manned the telephone while I was out and had two beers and a ham-and-cheese. When I returned, the sheriff's office had phoned.

Bernie said, "You asked about the paint. It's potassium permanganate—doctors use it for skin troubles."

"For athlete's foot," I said. "She had athlete's foot." I felt like a fat old fool, and it served me right for trying to play detective like the rest of them—by looking for clues.

Later, just to seem busy, we drove out to the beach. It was still blazing hot, and the beach was cluttered with umbrellas and towels and kids and people, and south of the beach two cars from the sheriff's office were parked along the road. We could see them still sifting through the sand.

On the way back Bernie said, "Come to think of it, her having that stuff on her brush—that's kind of peculiar."

"She had to put it on her feet," I said.

"But it stains," he said, and then it hit me.

"That's it, Bernie," I yelled. "That's it! Let's get back to the office."

"You okay?" Bernie asked. "The heat got you?"

He tried to find out what it was, but I told him it was just a hunch. Maybe it was wrong, and if it was, I didn't want to look like a bigger fool than I am.

At the office I called Mrs. Jean May's home, and Mary answered the telephone. "It's O'Brien, Mary,"

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I said. "I want you to help me. It may be very important."

"Yes," she said, "of course. What is it?"

"You know where the main electric switch is in the basement. You go down there and turn off all the current, and that will turn off the air conditioning."

"I don't understand."

"I want the house to get hot."

"Oh," she said. "Why?"

"Never mind why, Mary. You just pull the switch, and tell Mrs. May something blew out. When she goes for a swim to cool off, you call me at the office. I'll be waiting here. And Mary, don't let her know what's going on."

"It sounds ridiculous," she said, "but if it's what you want."

"Good girl," I said.

Then we sat and waited. It was thirty minutes before she called, and we got in the car and went through the only traffic light in the valley and made it out past the beach to Jean May's house in exactly ten minutes.

I told Bernie to stand by in the house, and I walked around the side and through the garden and then onto the wooden walk that went over the sand dunes down to the beach. But I was late.

She had finished her swim, and she was coming toward me on the boardwalk. She had a terrycloth robe wrapped tight around her.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

"I have to talk to you, Mrs. May."

"This is a private beach, Officer O'Brien. Please get off it."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Would you mind taking off that robe."

"You're impertinent!"

"It's no good," I said.

"I don't know what you are talking about. And if you don't get off this property at once, I shall call Mayor Daley."

"Let's go into the house, Mrs. May," I said. "Then we can both call Daley."

I walked behind her. Her hair was shiny and black in the sun and she walked as straight as pride itself, as if she wasn't afraid at all. But she must have realized I knew the truth.

The house had turned into an oven, and Bernie and Mary were waiting for us in the living room.

Mrs. May said, "If you will excuse me, I'll go get dressed. You gentlemen seem to have taken over the house." She started walking across the room.

I reached out and pulled the robe down, and she didn't move. You could see the brownish-purple paint through the bathing suit and the shadows made her look pudgy and old. I could see where it would be funny at a party, or if Manicotti ever saw it, he would roar with laughter.

"I don't get it," Bernie said.

"Mrs. May," I said, "why don't you change while we wait for the sheriff." I asked Mary to go with

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her, and I told her, "Yell if you have any trouble. But watch her. She's going to be charged with murder."

Bernie said, "Are you crazy, Obie? Daley will really fire us now!"

"There has to be a reason for murder," I said. "I couldn't figure out a reason until Manicotti told me his wife might have been jealous of Mrs. May. And you gave me the rest of it.

"Lila Manicotti used to paint designs on the kids and adults, and it always amused everyone—Manicotti got a lot of laughs out of it. She knew potassium permanganate would stain the skin. You pointed that out. She was jealous and she wanted her husband to laugh at Jean May.

"So, when the women separated for their swim, she painted Mrs. May so he'd laugh, and the paint didn't wash off. Mrs. May got home, found the paint had stained her skin, and she went out and found Lila walking on the beach. There was an argument, a fight. Mrs. May is strong. Manicotti said she had force, that's why he was doing a portrait of her.

"If I wasn't a fat old village cop, I'd have guessed something was wrong when she wore a housecoat that covered her up from her neck to her toes."

"Well I'll be darned," Bernie said.

Jean May stared at me, then she went slowly out of the room.

I went to the telephone and called Daley. "I got you an arrest, Jim," I said. "But it may not help in the election. Everyone knows you and she have been awfully chummy."

"Now listen, you raving idiot," he said. "In a small town like ours a murder like this can mean the election. I want you looking *busy!*"

"Jim," I said, "Will you listen to me. I got you the murderer. It was Jean May."

"What are you two clowns doing?" he yelled.

I explained it to him. Then I said, "I've got to call the sheriff, Jim, and you know, I never wanted to be just a village cop all my life. Maybe I'll run for mayor."

I could hear him spluttering as I hung up.

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RUFUS KING**

TITLE: ***A Borderline Case***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALES: Florida and Rhode Island

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Jackson had no fears—with one exception. He had an overpowering dread, an absolute terror, a consuming phobia, of death. Not other peoples' — but of his own . . . A story with the impact of a case history.*

THAT WAS WHAT DR. WILLIAMSON, in his capacity as county psychiatrist, labeled Jackson— "a borderline case." Not quite psychopathic and not quite sane but then, as the psychiatrist pointed out, who is?—and aren't we all?

Naturally there was a modest touch of hindsight in the diagnosis because Jackson, by then, had been extradited from Florida and was under indictment up north for homicide in the first degree.

"You'd have to know him," Dr. Williamson said, acknowledging his manservant's murmur that dinner was served, "know him clinically before you could appreciate the emotional complexities that led to his murder of the old blister. He's a killer and must be considered a serious danger to society and still—still I liked him."

Everybody liked Jackson.

This wasn't a generality, it was literally true. Absurdly so, because he was far from being an attractive young man (age 24) in the classic sense, his face having the storm lowerings of a fullback about to lunge and his body being a throwback to his grandfather Jason's, a bull of a man who had been a lumberjack before migrating to Florida after the turn of the century possessing only a head cold, $700 in gold coin, and a gutful of rum.

It was Jackson's sudden smile

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more than anything else that accounted for his universal popularity. It transfigured him from a brooding and hefty piece of sculpture by Gutzon Borglum into a body warmed by humor and the goodness of friendship. Dr. Williamson, who is funny that way, said the smile gave Jackson an ozone smell. Which is awfully near, he added, to the smell of brimstone.

"He is innately ruthless, but you would never suspect it. His surface magnetism, which is mostly animal, accounts for that. You would think him fearless and you would be right. With the exception," Dr. Williamson qualified, "of one overpowering dread—an absolute terror of death. Not other peoples' deaths —they are negligible to him—but his own death."

This was true. The details of dying, when Jackson applied them to himself, were an unwashed and horrible form of morbidity. That his mouth, for example, into which he could put such interesting things to eat, should be clamped shut by an undertaker. Such melancholy and unappetizing trivia would seize him whenever he was alone, and they gripped him on that Sunday afternoon of this year when a television series began its fall and winter season.

The telecast dealt with the theme of capital punishment, tracing the fascinating art from the days when a condemned felon was strapped down flat and a succession of lead blocks were arranged on his body until, in a state of helpless exasperation, he was crushed to death.

A variety of other methods followed—hanging, the guillotine, the gas chamber, and the now fashionable use of electricity to parboil the brain.

One detail of the broadcast impacted itself with the power of a revelation on Jackson's mind: seven of our United States did not have the death penalty. The more convenient of these to Florida were Rhode Island and Maine, both of which meted out to a convicted murderer the comparatively agreeable severity of imprisonment for the balance of his natural life.

This enticingly left open to the convicted wretch the hopeful vista of ultimate parole, or the more immediate possibility of escape contrived through heavy money properly placed in bribes.

Why, Jackson wondered, did not a man who intended to commit a murder seize upon this inestimable advantage of eliminating the electric chair (the shadow of which had so far proved an unsurmountable deterrent to his own wishful plans) and arrange his killing in one of those seven enlightened states?

Well, why didn't he—?

It attracted Jackson as the perfect form of life insurance.

"That broadcast," Dr. Williamson said, "was the spark that started the powder train of Jackson's conscienceless and foolishly compli-

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cated murder plot. He knew nothing whatever about the topography of Rhode Island or Maine, so he went about getting this information in the most reasonable way, straight from the horse's mouth . . ."

The Chamber of Commerce building in Halcyon (a domesticated township lying on the Gold Coast of Florida, between the theatrical splendors of Miami Beach and the more coupon-clipping solidity of Fort Lauderdale) is located in a meager park and affords among its other admirable activities a registration service for tourists who plan to settle during a short vacation or for the season. Their home town and state are listed, as well as their Halcyon address.

Jackson strolled there from the bank which his grandfather Jason had founded, after the old gentleman had cured his head cold and pyramided his 700 bucks, during the sucker-laden boom, into a fortune. Among the arrivals of the past couple of weeks Jackson found no one who was registered from Maine, but there was a Mr. Herkimer Smith from a place called Foster in Rhode Island. Mr. Smith listed his Halcyon residence as the Silver Lining Motel.

After banking hours Jackson called on Mr. Smith who was of retirement age, a widower, still friendless so far as Florida was concerned, and in such a state of homesick loneliness that he would have fervently welcomed the handclasp of a door-to-door salesman.

"I noticed your name on the tourist register," Jackson said with his electrifying smile, "and dropped by to say hello."

"Now don't tell me you're from Rhode Island, too," Smith said, growing warmly delighted.

"No, but I have a distant cousin who used to live in that town you come from—Foster—and I thought you might have known Charley. Charley Whipple."

"Whipple?" Smith would have given a lot to say yes, not to have to disturb this connecting link with a companionable stranger, but he could not. "No, seems as though I don't recollect any Whipples, and Foster's population is only around two thousand, so it's likely I'd have heard the name. Of course, I only lived there for the past five years."

"That accounts for it," Jackson said glibly. "Charley left Foster eight or nine years ago and where he is now I haven't the faintest idea. I hoped you might be able to give me a clue."

But Charley or no Charley, the ice was broken, and two hours and three obscure taverns later Jackson had a photographic picture of the village of Foster—of how to get there and (of primary importance) the nearby waters.

The only sizeable body of water, Smith told him, was Killingsby Pond which lay roughly twenty miles to the northwest of the vil-

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lage. "It's named a pond," Smith said, "but it's really a lake—sort of long and narrow, and pretty big at that."

Homicidal drownings, Jackson recalled from his research into an authoritative work, *are rare, comprising about .04 per cent of all homicides in New York City.*

"Lonely sort of spot, Killingsby Pond," Smith went on, "But beautiful. Lets a man be alone with nature."

The circumstances of death are usually not ascertainable, for the chances are that the drowning occurred in the absence of eyewitnesses. Subsequent investigation may fail to elicit evidence which would justify classifying the drowning specifically as homicidal, suicidal, or accidental.

Unless, Jackson reasoned, specific indications were arranged to point strongly to one of the three—as in his proposed plan of the old blister's suicide. "Not many people around?" he asked. "Campers, things like that?"

"No," Smith said with the precise diction of six snorts and six beer chasers, "there are not. As I say, Killingsby Pond is a spot where a man can commune. When I think back on it, it makes me want to cry."

Smith did cry, and Jackson returned him to the Silver Lining Motel where he felt reasonably assured Smith would wake up in the morning with a terrifying hangover, a wrecked stomach, and with any memories of the past moist evening a convenient blur.

"So we know," Dr. Williamson explained, signaling his manservant to bring in the next course, "that the first emotional block was removed—Jackson's overpowering dread of death by the electric chair, should he be caught and brought to justice. Naturally he had no intention of being caught, but even if by the millionth chance he should be, the State of Rhode Island would not, could not, take his life. And he had plenty of loot to try and bribe his escape out of prison. His defalcations, as you know, were considerable . . ."

The Halcyon Bank and Trust is a handsome stone-faced building on the boulevard leading to the beach, and its lobby contains, among gracious pillars, potted palms and urns of deceitful plastic flowers, a portrait of the founder. This insult to the name of Art depicts Grandfather Jason as the lumberjack he had been, but stiltedly glacéd with the habiliments of wealth and position. It is a thorough deletion of basic character, even to what had been the rumpot color of the old gentleman's powerful nose.

The assets of the bank are impressive, and Jackson in his sinecure as Assistant Manager in Charge of New Accounts had had little difficulty in absorbing into his own pockets (actually a pigskin suitcase stashed among stored luggage in

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his pseudo-Moorish homestead) some $230,000 in cash and negotiable securities.

"You must keep in mind," Dr. Williamson insisted, "that Jackson is the last of the line. His mother died shortly following his birth, and about a year ago his father exited in a blaze of glory when his cruiser *Saffron III* blew up in Biscayne Bay. The popular fiction of great family wealth, incidentally, blew up with it because the estate after probate yielded mostly debts, and certainly not enough to keep young Jackson even in his Sulka ties. His father with consummate skill had squandered old Jason's pile in a surreptitious carnival of gambling—in foreign casinos because of his position as president of the bank—as well as in a costly style of living and a succession of three jewel-happy mistresses, who subscribed wholeheartedly to the cliché that diamonds are a girl's best friend."

Dr. Williamson paused to squeeze a shot of key lime onto the tender flesh of a stone crab's claw. "If it seems to you that I am relating these odds and ends out of their chronological order," he said, "you are quite right. Jackson's intention—his necessity, really—to murder old Parker was born several nights previous to the television broadcast I've just mentioned, and it happened like this . . ."

The large staff of servants that had served the ancestral home were, after *Saffron III* ballooned in flame, a luxury of the past, and Jackson, who lived there in solitary bachelorhood, was sketchily taken care of by a minimum-wage Haitian couple who would drift in around eight in the morning and hustle out at five when Jackson either suppered at a tavern or in company of one of the few friends left him.

This night, when he got home after dining, he found Parker, known at the bank as "the old blister," seated in a wicker chair on the porch and puffing away on his putrid pipe.

"Well, good evening, Mr. Parker," Jackson said.

Parker made no effort toward uplifting his delicate bones from the chair. In the moon-faded darkness his black, beady eyes gave out onyx glints under their canopy of lemon-gray hairs.

"Sit down, Jackson," he said. "I've come to talk to you."

Jackson experienced a complex wave of reactions at this gently mouthed but peremptory command. Dominant among them was a sense of alarm—faint but as insistent as a warning bell.

"Delighted that you did," he said. "I'm always glad to see you."

"Well, you won't be this time, Jackson."

"No?"

"No. I've got you dead to rights."

"That has always struck me as an ambiguous expression," Jackson said with barely contrived pleasant-

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ness. "I don't know what it means in a literal sense."

"In my sense, Jackson, it means I've uncovered the fact that you've been robbing the bank blind."

One odd, and in an oblique way, admirable trait about Jackson was his habit of never sidestepping what he felt to be a demonstrable truth. Instead, he would not only face it but he would attack it head on. Now that he knew the worst—he brushed aside as stupid any doubts that Parker had the necessary proof of his larceny—he congealed into an efficient, clear-headed fighting machine to probe and pierce the core of his opponent's weakness. For there was a weakness, otherwise Parker would have taken his knowledge directly to the Board of Directors instead of coming to Jackson himself.

"What put you on?" he asked with honest curiosity.

Parker evidently got a shock of surprise at this certainly unexpected admission of Jackson's guilt. He wasn't prepared for it, having looked forward to an enjoyable hour of devious denials.

"Your vacation," he said, "last month."

"What of it?"

"They had me fill in for you while you were gone."

"I know they did. So what? All you had to do was sit on your rump and interview some tourist with a bundle every other day or so."

Parker sighed with the effect of a long-pent disgust. "You never did give a damn about the Bulletins that come in now and then, did you?"

"What about them?"

"I refer specifically to the most recent Loss Prevention Bulletin issued by the Bank-Share Owners Advisory League. I take it you didn't even bother to read it?"

"Good Lord, no."

"A pity. To paraphrase the section that pertains to your case, one of the first recommendations made by the F.B.I. to circumvent defaulters is that each bank employee have a two-week vacation every year."

"They always do have."

"Usually, yes, and while this might appear to be a purely humanitarian suggestion on the part of the F.B.I. it is actually directed at a very basic problem."

"I don't get it."

"I know you don't—and didn't. As the F.B.I. so kindly pointed out, it is relatively easy for anyone to juggle his books and records without detection—if he continues to be the *only* one to handle them. But if someone else must take them over for a couple of weeks, any falsifications run an excellent chance of being found out."

Jackson was coldly outraged at this uncalled for and, to him, presumptuous nosiness. "You had no legitimate reason for going back through my records. You're not an auditor or an examiner."

"The fact remains," Parker said smugly, "that I did."

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"But why?"

"You."

"Me? Just because I'm me?"

"Not entirely, and this will seem strange to you, Jackson, but I've been interested in you ever since your father's death. Because, you see, the two of us are birds of a feather."

This stumped Jackson by its very absurdity, until the simple basis for the comparison struck him—each, given the urgency, had larceny in his soul. He knew why he himself had stolen. He had no curiosity as to what Parker's motive would have been had not he, Jackson, already amassed the loot. It was easy to appreciate Parker's intention—to suppress his knowledge of the damning evidence and, instead, to blackmail Jackson for as much as the pressure would bear.

Jackson's smile was different from his usual one. "How much do you want?" he asked.

"Naturally," Dr. Williamson said, "the one thing that Jackson needed at that instant was time. He was quite ready to buy it. He was prepared to concede to any demand Parker might make, no matter how drastic. To promise anything. Not that he had the remotest intention of keeping his word, but he could not at the moment determine any safe method for crushing this willowy vampire who was prepared to suck him dry, and who certainly held the equipment to do so.

"All Jackson was certain of was that he wanted to kill Parker, and the only thing that stopped him from braining the old goat on the spot was the devastating dread that possessed him of his own death—which would be an accomplished fact were he to be found guilty of Murder One in Florida."

Dr. Williamson turned his attention to the wet and intricate process of paring and eating a mango. "You might care to know," he said, wishing he had a bath towel, "what started Jackson off on his desperate looting. It was a girl, of course . . ."

People occasionally and rather snobbishly point out that Florida's Gold Coast Society can best be described by saying it isn't. Not in the Palm Beach, Newport, or Bar Harbor sense of the meaning. Money apparently forms its basis—large industrial and trade fortunes which permit membership in all three of the ultra-ultra clubs.

Until his father was uncomfortably devoured by flames, Jackson had all his life had enough of a financial standing to be "accepted." It was the life he had been brought up in and the only one he knew. He had missed the leavening process of war, knew little of the country outside of Florida, and his standards were from habit those of the set in which he moved.

Some time before the *Saffron III* disaster Jackson had become engaged to Miss Manessa Lou Stotes

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whose family were in rubber. He had thought it love and so, at the time, had Miss Stotes. But after the probate of the father's will had made the ridiculousness of her fiancé's inheritance a matter of public knowledge, Miss Stotes changed her sharp little mind.

Later, Jackson attempted to explain the original love sensation to Dr. Williamson—the blinding effect Miss Stotes had first had on him. It was, he said, like all the five senses being rolled together—not cancelling, but augmenting each other into one intolerable blast of fierce pleasure. Actually, pain and pleasure. He had fumbled between the two words with an earnest intensity—as if they held the explanation, as if any juggling of words could hold a convincing explanation of love.

This triple shock—the breaking off of the engagement by Miss Stotes, the wiping out of easy affluence, and the burden of his father's concealed debts—these blows were, to put it mildly, rough. Nothing but the inherited lumberjack stamina of Grandfather Jason helped Jackson from becoming a punch-drunk bum.

Two things alone seemed clear to him: he still had his job at the bank and he was off all women for life.

This blanket decision about the perfidy of womankind was, Dr. Williamson feels, the crucial factor in shoving Jackson into his fling at crime. Jackson considered quite naturally that Miss Stotes had acted callously, brutally, and unforgivably in chucking him the minute his financial rating dropped to that of an ordinary bank employee.

She had explained her stand in the tenderest and most sensible manner—"Honestly, darling, it simply never works out. Just take a look at the cases around you—Wally Hazelton practically has to crawl to Estelle for cigarette money. I certainly don't intend to give up my little necessities like Biarritz and the yacht and a new Jag every year and what would you feel like, darling?"

Miss Stotes had herself supplied the answer: simply a sort of half-baked gigolo. Jackson's courtly reaction to her kindly meant effort was a hot impulse to squeeze the pulp out of her once-beloved swan-like neck.

He did go silly for a time, giving up his membership in the three expensive clubs and eliminating all social contacts beyond unavoidable business encounters at the bank.

He did so because, as he explained to Dr. Williamson, if he continued the usual social rounds of night-club and general lushings without carrying his own weight with the tabs, he would have felt akin to any of the numerous muscular young men who studded the beach set's lavender fringe—the ones whose cachet-of-arrival was usually conventionalized by the fond gift of a star sapphire ring and charge accounts on Lincoln Road.

Following this give-it-all-up in-

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terlude, Jackson cooled off to the extent of becoming steel-cold. He clothed himself in the camouflage of being a fine, upstanding young banker who in spite of adversity could keep his tough chin up and could take it. He resumed contact with a few friends, accepting their casual hospitality, but never becoming overly indebted.

Then he really went to work on looting the bank.

"Jackson's purpose," Dr. Williamson conceded, "was quite understandable when you take into consideration the fact that his whole comfortable and happy concept of existence had suddenly been ripped from beneath him like a rug, and through absolutely no fault of his own. That's the important point—he'd had no finger in it, had no faintest advance indication that a cataclysmic pratfall was coming. Of course it warped him and turned him bitter. It brought to the surface all the dormant bad traits that admittedly must have lain subconsciously in his character. As they lie in most of us, I'm afraid."

Dr. Williamson thought coffee would be more agreeable on the patio and told his manservant so.

"What Jackson had in mind," the psychiatrist expanded, "was a new identity, a new life, and money enough to live comfortably for the extent of it. An absolute divorce from everyone and everything he had ever known, and a swift escape from the intolerable situation he considered fate had plunged him in. It's possible that in his youthful fashion he had a naive and romantic idea of a tropical islet where he would be born afresh to take up whatever work or hobby might appeal to him when the boredom of doing nothing began to irritate. And perhaps he might have done just that—if Parker hadn't thrown in his monkey wrench and thus elected himself to the role of an essential corpse . . ."

For the couple of days that intervened between Parker's ultimatum (one half of the loot as payment for his silence) and the television broadcast on capital punishment, Jackson blanked himself within a mental wall where every thought revolved cold-bloodedly and with intensive concentration on the safe accomplishment of murder.

He had been able to convince Parker that the securities and cash had been carefully concealed by him "outside of Florida" during his recent vacation. He refused to disclose the location of the cache, but agreed to meet Parker's demands as soon as he would have completed arrangements for his own disappearance.

This had appeared satisfactory to Parker because, perhaps, it had to be. Nevertheless, Jackson was aware that Parker did his best to watch him like a molting hawk.

Jackson evaded this jejune sur-

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veillance and spent some hours in a public library absorbing several standard works on criminology. He used the Miami library instead of Halcyon's, where he would have been recognized and his unusual interest in the technicalities of crime noticed.

And still no satisfactory answer came to him until the television telecast hit with the effect of a long, cool drink of water. In the State of Rhode Island he could kill, and even if he were stupid enough to get caught the law could not kill him.

There was the problem to be faced of not only getting himself, but of getting Parker to Rhode Island.

Haste seemed not only desirable but advisable now that Parker had brought the matter to a head. So the coming week-end became the target. With his detailed information gleaned from the garrulous tourist Herkimer Smith, Jackson figured he would catch a flight after banking hours on Friday for Boston.

He would arrange at the terminal to have a rental car waiting for him and would drive at once to his destination. He plotted his route from an automobile association's route maps. Massachusetts into Rhode Island to Woonsocket, on to Pascoag, then down to Herkimer Smith's village of Foster. Then the last lap—the twenty-odd miles northwestward to Killingsby Pond where, before the exposing light of dawn, he would polish off the job. He would be back in Halcyon by Saturday night, certainly by early Sunday morning. In time for church.

The biggest hurdle lay in devising a method for putting Parker on the spot at Killingsby Pond.

"I've already admitted," Dr. Williamson continued, "that the whole plot was a foolishly complicated one; but Jackson was forced to make it so because nothing on earth could have tempted him to commit murder except the fact that the crime would take place in a state that had abolished capital punishment. Never lose sight of that point—it is crucial."

Dr. Williamson thanked his manservant for the tray of bourbon and branch water, and said there would be nothing further for the night.

"The problem of getting Parker to Killingsby Pond actually was a simple one—just a case of good psychology on Jackson's part. He was satisfied that Parker was breaking his neck trying to keep him under surveillance, and he was equally satisfied that Parker would do his best to trail him when he would leave town, supposedly to recover the hidden securities and cash. To prevent a double-cross. So he made things almost childishly simple for Parker . . ."

Jackson drove at a conservative speed south on the Federal Highway toward Miami. He drove conservatively out of consideration for

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Parker who he knew was tailing him with the doubtful virtuosity of a late-show dick. At 36th he turned west and after a dowager-paced drive past drab reaches of shops, bars, and billboards Jackson parked at the airport.

He slowed down his movements in order to give Parker time to park and then slither into the tourist-spattered terminal after him. Under the alias of Jasper Morton, Jackson bought space for Boston on a flight late the following afternoon. Taking care to be completely unaware of Parker, he moved to another counter to arrange for a rental car to be awaiting his arrival.

While attending to this he obliquely kept an eye on Parker who spoke to the reservations clerk and himself bought flight space which he shoved into his pocket in a commendably furtive fashion. Jackson paused at the exit doors to light a cigarette and to watch, under cover of the movement, Parker heading for and stopping at the car rental counter, too.

"And so," Dr. Williamson said smugly, "the hook was baited. Jackson was as certain as sunrise that Parker, unquestionably in some abortive attempt at disguise, would accompany him aboard the plane and then trail him like a bloodhound in his own rental car. What he failed to suspect, and the thing that proved his ultimate downfall, was the fact that Parker would have with him . . ."

Jackson, carrying an outsize brief case, walked with other passengers toward the boarding ramp, having first unobservedly spotted his intended victim behind a family group of voluble South Americans.

Parker, who had once played the role of Polonius in a Halcyon Little Theater Group production, had spirit-gummed on his chin a lemon-gray crepe-hair Vandyke beard. It was a passable job and undetectable unless you looked twice, and nobody ever looked twice at Parker. Dark glasses and a shielding homburg completed the masquerade.

After they were airborne Jackson sat at ease gazing at banks of cumulus beyond the window and consciously exuding an impression of complete satisfaction that he had evaded being followed. Parker was seated, he knew, across the aisle and a good many rows behind him.

A stewardess moved leisurely about gathering coats, carried against the coming northern chill after Miami's sun, and hanging them in the rear of the plane. Jackson decided to catch several hours sleep. He hoped that Parker would also get some sleep. It was going to be a long, tough night.

Tougher than he knew.

The trouble didn't start until shortly before dawn when they reached Killingsby Pond, which lay, as Herkimer Smith had stated, some 20 miles to the northwest of Foster. It had been a more rugged and endless-seeming drive for Jack-

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son than it had for Parker, because Jackson had had to make sure that Parker was following him without letting on to Parker that he knew he was being tailed. It was a queer sort of situation that became a greater and greater strain on Jackson's nerves, like the cautious playing of a delicately hooked fish.

The village of Foster was little more than that—a meagerly lighted main street, then the dark of the night and the silent, empty road to the lake. Beyond what was focused in the headlights, Jackson retained no impression of the countryside. His energies were beginning to fade. His arms felt heavy and tired, and his hands were weights of unleavened dough on the wheel; so he swallowed a capsule that a friend had given him and was becoming exhilarated in a small measure by the time he caught sight of the water—a dark, quiet sheen silvered in patches by a waning moon.

Slowly, aware that Parker now with his lights out had closed in on him, Jackson followed the shoreline of Killingsby Pond as though searching for identification guides that would lead him to the mythical cache.

The stillness, except for the sound of the car motor, was a breathing thing and Jackson experienced a surge of impatience to get the job over with. He had no idea how far they had driven parallel with the lakeshore nor had he the slightest knowledge of what this particular location was like; but he pulled off the road, doused his lights, and parked.

He got out and stood perfectly still, the brief case in one hand, a small flashlight in readiness in the other. He had not long to wait.

Hurrying, fluttering almost, toward him through the mock pallor of false dawn came Parker, and Jackson flashed the torch full on him. Parker stopped, a theatrical character in his silly false beard and tired-out old face, and it took a moment for Jackson to realize that the nickel-plated object in Parker's delicate hand was a revolver.

There was an undertone of laughter, of condescension in his voice, as Jackson said, "I see that you're taking no chances, Mr. Parker."

Parker held the gun aimed dead-center on Jackson's stomach. "Did you expect me to?" he asked.

"No, not really."

"You knew I was following you?"

"Of course."

"I wondered. I began to appreciate the care you took not to lose me."

"Thank you. Were the false whiskers for my benefit?"

"Not entirely. Rather as a protection against any chance recognition at the airport by someone else. My friends believe that I am spending the week-end at Key West."

Jackson was growing tired again, even a little bored. He considered the chances were negligible that Parker would shoot until after the

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supposed cache would be disclosed, unless he, Jackson, were to attempt some inimical move. He wondered idly, still faintly amused with the situation, whether the old scorpion's dream-cloud intention was to hijack the non-existent cache and then kill *him*.

"Let's get on with it," he said.

He turned his back on Parker and walked at a fair pace to the shore of the lake; then he continued along it in the direction they had been driving. Parker did not lag, and it was like having a venomous wraith breathing on his neck and holding a gun aimed at his back.

Jackson was glad of it. The fact of Parker being armed effaced the gap between his powerful strength and Parker's physical weakness. It altered the job in Jackson's mind from a one-sided murder into a duel where the antagonists were equalized. The victim now had a sporting chance.

It was no longer his muscle that counted against Parker. It would have to be his wits and the deadly value of surprise.

"Is it much farther?" Parker asked.

"Not much."

"We're over a mile at least from the cars."

"That's right."

"Why didn't you drive nearer?"

"Road turns inland from the lake." Jackson had no idea whether the road did so or not.

"What's the name of this lake?"

"Killingsby Pond."

Then Jackson found what he wanted, what he had been waiting for—the low-hanging, long, supple branch of a pine. He slowed his next few steps until he sensed Parker closing in on his back. Then he released the branch.

The backlash whipsnap caught Parker across the chest, knocking him flat, and Jackson leaped for the revolver still gripped in Parker's hand.

It was amazing how the old bromide sprang to life—how a man locked in a death struggle could be possessed with the strength of ten. An exaggeration, of course, for Jackson shortly wrenched and twisted the revolver from Parker's grip and tossed it out of reach.

After that it was quite easy.

He lugged Parker to the water's edge and held his old skull-feeling head under until he drowned. He got a razor blade from his brief case and carefully incised several parallel cuts across the body's dead wrist and neck.

Some suicidal cases [of drowning] *reveal characteristic parallel cuts on wrist and neck, strongly suggesting suicidal nature* [of the drowning].

Jackson then removed six negotiable securities from the brief case and stuffed them in Parker's inner coat pocket. He felt fine. He felt clever as hell.

In a few minutes he started back for Halcyon, wondering about the

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odd sound that reached him faintly across the waters of the lake. The cry, the sob of a loon.

"They say that the gods on Olympus used to laugh," Dr. Williamson said, adding a splash of branch water to the bourbon, "whenever a mortal touched the peaks of success. They would have been convulsed over Jackson. You can understand the sense of confidence that filled him, because he was so blindly satisfied with his own smartness. In fact, he couldn't resist improving upon it, with frills . . ."

The first thing Jackson attended to on Monday morning after reaching the bank was a partial doctoring of the records that Parker had examined. He made several rather obvious erasures of numerals at certain points of falsification and then re-entered exactly the same numerals.

He felt terribly clever about this, reasoning that Parker's fingerprints would be on the suspect pages (as indeed they were) and that Parker would be presumed to have made the false entries while he had taken over during Jackson's vacation—Parker's purpose being to make Jackson Suspect One when the bank examiners discovered the embezzlement.

This would, Jackson reasoned to his own satisfaction, tie in perfectly with the disclosure of Parker's "suicide-from-remorse," while on flight, with several of the stolen securities on his body, with the planted alibi among his friends that he was "spending the week-end at Key West," and—a perfect clincher—with the disguise of a crepe-hair beard still glued on his chin. What else would the guy be doing, except taking it on the lam?

As for the bulk of the plunder, the authorities could figure that Parker either had hidden it before remorse suddenly drove him to kill himself, or that an initial chance discoverer of the body had made off with the remainder of the securities and cash, leaving the body for somebody else to discover.

As a final precaution against any eventuality, no matter how improbable, Jackson removed the pigskin suitcase from the stored-luggage room and concealed it in an unused stone smokehouse in the rear of the estate, a small structure almost smothered through the years with tropical vegetation.

It was all very reassuring, and Jackson hadn't a shred of doubt but that he could sail through the upcoming investigation with flying, if hypocritically shocked, colors. He would not now have to disappear. He could take his time in clearing up the meager remnants of the estate and then with an honorable name, plus the pigskin suitcase stuffed with a fortune, take an orderly leave from Halcyon. Because of its no longer bearable tragic associations.

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Yes, he was truly on top of the world.

"So that was Jackson's frame of mind," Dr. Williamson said, "when the news broke. It broke not only at the bank but in the Halcyon, Miami, and Fort Lauderdale papers and on the networks. Few people did not fail to hear or read about it. Among them, Mr. Herkimer Smith. Smith felt, after a few hours cogitation, that it was his duty as a now Florida citizen and a once-resident of Foster, Rhode Island, to put in his two cents' worth of obliquely peculiar but possibly pertinent information . . ."

The man, when Jackson answered the door chime, was a stranger. He was of Jackson's own age, well knit and quietly dressed, with an intellectual face unsmiling in the evening shadows.

"My name is Fillmore," he said in a mannerly voice. "With the F.B.I."

"Come in, Mr. Fillmore."

They went into an oppressively appointed study, heavy with mahogany and wine-colored brocade curtains, and Fillmore politely refused a drink.

"It's about the bank," he said.

"Yes?"

"Yes."

The silence held. The disproportionately loud sound of a tree frog outside an open jalousie broke it.

"Is there," Jackson asked, "any particular reason why you've come to see me?"

"There are several. We first became interested in you because of certain information volunteered to us by a Mr. Herkimer Smith. You do know Mr. Smith?"

"Smith?" *Keep the smile lazy, Jackson.* "Herkimer Smith?"

"He moved down here from Foster, Rhode Island. Where," Fillmore himself smiled faintly, "your distant cousin Charley Whipple once lived."

"Of course. That Smith. We downed a couple of brews together. What about him?"

"Well, when he heard the news about Mr. Parker, about the body being found at Killingsby Pond, he was reminded of your somewhat excessive questions about that particular locality. He remembered your name, although he wasn't aware that you were connected with the bank. We, of course, knew that you were. It interested us."

"Coincidence."

Fillmore raised polite eyebrows. "Isn't that rather far-fetched?"

"No. I remember now telling Mr. Parker about the place."

"Why would you?"

"Because of Smith. A newcomer. The possibility of his becoming a new account. It must have stuck in Mr. Parker's mind—possibly as a good place to vanish to, to take on a new identity."

"That's reasonable." Fillmore's voice hardened. "But it doesn't gibe."

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"Gibe with what?"

"With your having been there with him at Killingsby Pond," Fillmore said.

It was a longer silence this time, and even the tree frog respected it.

"Just what makes you think so, Mr. Fillmore?"

"Any number of proofs." Fillmore's voice sounded tired with the ineptitude, the stupidities, the amateur complications of the plot that Jackson had woven, the wide open trail he had blazed for the state police and for the F.B.I. to follow.

"A set of fingerprints other than those of Mr. Parker," he said, "were on the nickel-plated revolver found near the body. As soon as Mr. Smith told us of your excessive interest in the locality we compared them with your prints on file with the bank's bonding company. Our conclusion was that the embezzlement had been a conspiracy between yourself and Mr. Parker. From the location of your prints on the gun we believed that you forced the gun out of his hand and tossed it to where the troopers found it. Then you killed him."

"It was suicide." *Keep pitching, Jackson.* "He slashed his wrist, his throat, then had some sort of seizure and fell down by the water's edge with his face in the water—"

"And you?"

"I—ran."

"The securities found in his pocket had *your* fingerprints on them—*but none of his.* So you put them there. What have you done with the rest?"

That's what he's been shadow boxing for, Jackson thought. To recover the plunder. His, Jackson's, solid ace in the hole.

"I told you," he said steadily, "I ran. I left everything there. It's a silly thing to admit, but the sight of blood unnerves me."

Fillmore, after a while, said, "There was no blood."

"I'm telling you I saw him slice his wrist and throat."

"Mr. Parker was dead when that was done. By you. One of the cuts on the wrist had severed an artery. Had he been living, had his heart been pumping when the cuts were made, there would have been blood—plenty of blood. Except for any small seepage caused by gravitation, the dead do not bleed."

Hold it tight, hold it tighter than you ever have before, Jackson. Even at the worst never lose sight of one blessed fact—the State of Rhode Island can't kill you.

"They'll want you here in Florida for grand larceny," Fillmore was saying. "But Connecticut will have precedence. They'll extradite you and indict you for murder in the first degree."

It took a moment for Fillmore's words to register—especially one word.

Then—

"You're all fouled up, Mr. Fillmore. What's Connecticut got to do with it?"

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"Just a question of geography," Fillmore said with patience. "Rhode Island is bordered on the west by Connecticut, and the village of Foster is right by the state line. As for Killingsby Pond, it *straddles* the borderline and the murder was committed on the Connecticut side."

Fillmore added impersonally as he stood up, "So that's where you'll fry—in Connecticut."

Dr. Williamson led the way continuing to talk as he went.

"Of course it smashed Jackson completely," he said. "He went utterly to pieces, and babbled out a detailed confession. Carried on like a maniac. That's why they called me in—to take a look at him before the Governor decided on extradition."

Dr. Williamson's smile was half apologetic as he added, "That's why, in all senses of the word, I call it a borderline case."

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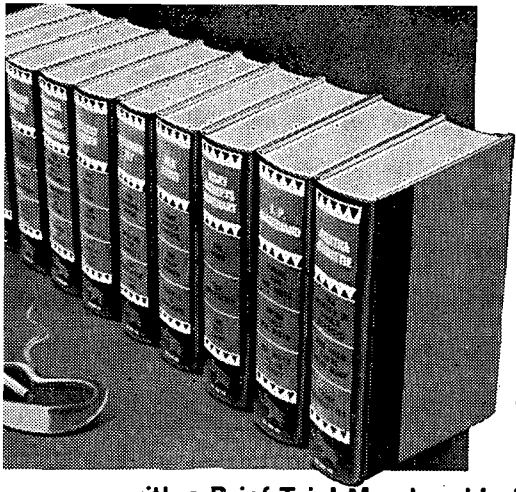

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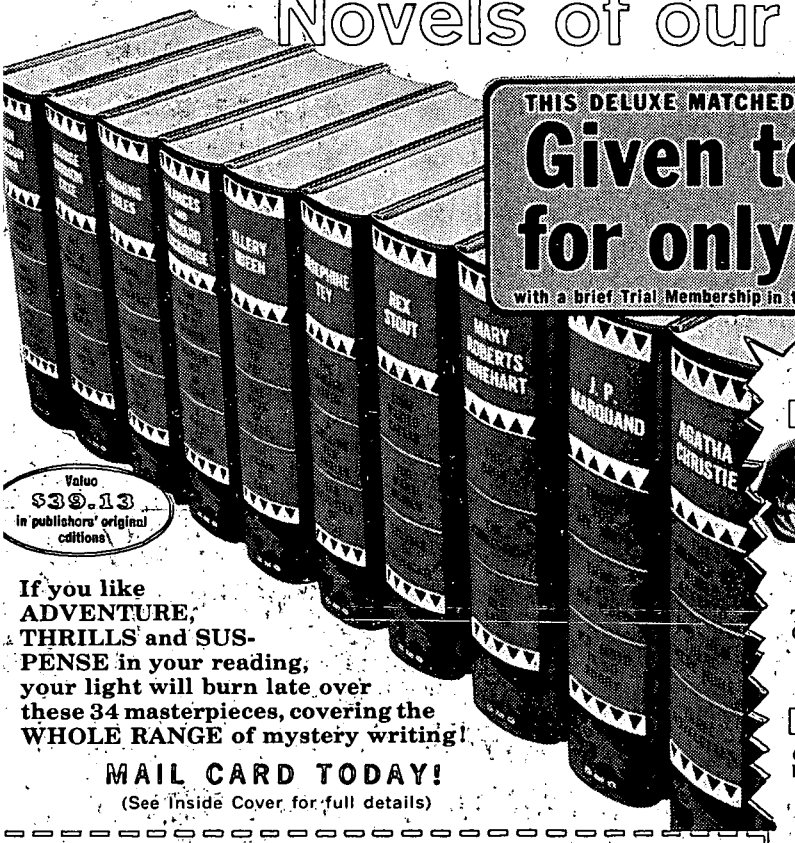

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